THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

School Violence: Administrative Leadership in Decision Making

by

Irene Maria MacDonald

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled SCHOOL VIOLENCE: ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP IN DECISION MAKING submitted by IRENE MARIA MACDONALD in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION.

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DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to those teachers, principals and support staff who are committed to fostering a climate in schools which rejects a culture of violence. It is through their efforts, perseverance and dedication that our young people will learn to effectively deal with the conflicts which they encounter, knowing that when they do falter they will not be punished for their social illiteracy, but will be responded to with an ethic of caring and compassion for the struggles and challenges they face.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation reports the findings of a study designed to explore those variables that influenced exemplary junior high school principals in their decisions to prevent, or to respond to school violence. The data source comprised twelve purposefully selected principals, who were interviewed from one large, urban, school district in Western Canada. These individuals had been identified as demonstrating both knowledge and success in the area of violence prevention.

Using the principles of grounded theory methods, interview data were analyzed and organized to form the basis of a theoretical model describing the influences on decision making and leadership related to school violence. Based on principals' understandings of violence as a symptom of other problems, a model describing four stages in the decision-making process, related to violence prevention, evolved. This model challenged current conceptualizations of violence and the motives for adopting violence prevention programs in schools.

The findings suggested that principals did not consider a reduction in school violence to be an objective of their decision making. Rather, they viewed the underlying causes of violence, often under the direct control of schools, as a more appropriate starting point for identifying problems. Principals balanced their personal beliefs of discipline, philosophies of schooling, and their understandings of the needs of adolescent students with the expectations and assumptions of staff and community. As an example, principals made a deliberate effort to replace control and rule-based discipline with a more humanistic model focused on self-discipline and expectations for behavior. With

full knowledge that these directions were often not supported by teachers, principals responded by playing a key role in the hiring and subsequent empowerment of those staff who shared their personal beliefs.

Principals determined needs of the school community by actively soliciting the views of students, which then formed the basis of viable alternatives for problem resolution. A key area of concern was the lack of attachment and sense of belonging often experienced in a large junior high school. Principals believed that if students' needs were met, and the school staff believed in serving the best interests of children first, little violence would occur in their schools. The primary outcome of these decisions was the establishment of a safe and caring school climate.

For those who are in the process of evaluating violence prevention programs, or seeking an understanding of how violence is conceptualized and operationalized at the junior high school level, the conclusions of this study challenge some underlying assumptions of previous research and offer insights applicable to both theory and practice.

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Every dissertation is both a journey and an adventure. It is filled with times of cerebral emptiness, great cognitive illumination, emotional abyss, frustration, and joy. Throughout the turbulent and exhilarating times, there were those friends and family who were always there to boost my morale, nudge me along, listen intently to what was often boring and dull, and suffer through those days when I suffered amnesia, hysteria, and a general loss of composure. At the top of the list of these stalwart individuals is my husband, Joe and our sons: Patrick, Mark and Michael. Thank you!

If there is even one reader who finds benefit in reading this manuscript - one who is influenced in some small measure to effect a more caring and safer environment in his or her school; then this endeavor will have been worth the effort.

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Chapter 1

ACT I

The Cast

Cam Smith is the new assistant principal of Supleh Senior High School in the city of Kalmon. He has been a teacher for the past 22 years, serving mostly in the more affluent junior high schools in the district. He is a specialist in social studies, and an avid sportsman.

Don is a grade 11 student at Supleh High, arriving a year ago from overseas. His parents have recently divorced and his usual A-average has suffered considerably from the stress of his current home situation. He is regarded by other students as mature for his age, often shy, but strong in his convictions. He plays in a local rock band and carries two part-time jobs.

Eneri has been the principal of Supleh High for the past four years. She has a background in physical education and extensive experience teaching in "high needs" schools across the district.

Mrs. Flint is a new French language teacher. Prior to this assignment, she had taught in the same French Immersion Junior High school for 12 years.

Their Story

Scene I : 1 a.m. Sunday morning

Large enough to be a city, yet intimate enough to feel like a small town. Set against the backdrop of the golden prairie sun, this was home. It was one of those windless, sweltering nights. No amount of tossing and turning could generate enough of a breeze to relieve the discomfort. In the distance: radios, television sets, and murmuring of conversations provided an endless pattern of dissonance. As the hours past, it became more difficult to focus on one's own thoughts. Unfortunately, when the silences came, they provided more disruption.

Conscious thoughts began to fuse with memories and the mind became confused between knowing what is, what was, and what could have been. Sleep came slowly, and through the night a restlessness prevailed, no doubt influenced by the heat, the distractions, and the memories of a few hours ago.

School Violence: Administrative Leadership in Decision Making

This study, based on the techniques of grounded theory research methods, asked the question: what factors influence principals in their responses to school violence? Beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, and decision-making strategies, as described by the 12 principals interviewed, were integrated to form a substantive theory that explored the meaning, values, and perspectives attached to the experiences described by the participants.

This chapter describes where the research question is positioned within the context of Canadian initiatives in the area of school violence. A brief overview of the important role that schools and their principals play in decisions related to violence prevention will provide readers with a basis for judging the potential theoretical and practical significance of this study. The chapter concludes with a description of how the thesis is organized.

Background to the Problem

School violence has increasingly become a focus of the media (e.g., Hutchinson, 1997; Onstad, 1997; Stewart, 1995) and researchers (e.g., Pepler & Craig, 1994; Smith, Bertrand, & Hornick, 1995; Walker, 1994). This attention has paralleled the heightened concern educators are expressing regarding the prevalence of behaviors which seriously disrupt student learning (e.g., Alberta Teachers' Association, 1992; British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994). Government initiatives (e.g., Alberta Education, 1994, 1996; Nova Scotia Department of Education, 1993; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1994)

have responded by encouraging schools to adopt programs and practices that focus on the prevention of serious disruptive behaviors, and the rehabilitation of those students who participate in violent acts.

In order to address these issues, many Canadian school boards have revisited programs and policies on behavior and discipline (Day, Golench, MacDougall, & Beals-Gonzalez, 1995). In schools, the most common responses for dealing with school violence have been increased sanctions and punitive measures (Day et al., 1995). For example, zero tolerance policies, which seek to punish or suppress serious disruptive or violent behaviors by suspending or expelling students, were becoming increasingly popular choices in Canada (Gabor, 1995), even though research suggested alternatives-to-suspensions programs were more effective (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1995).

Although various members of the school community contribute to its culture, the principal remains the primary influence for developing and building a vision and the environment which will nurture the values within that vision (Starratt, 1995). Principals are the key resource allocators, planners, and information conduits (Deal & Peterson, 1994). In their study on the successful implementation of conflict management programs in schools, Lieber and Rogers (1994) concluded that principals were pivotal in the success or failure of the programs. They were instrumental in raising awareness of the issues, and developing strategies to effectively deal with violence in schools.

Conclusions researchers have reached on the topic of school violence should take into account the role perception of the data sources, and assumptions the researchers had in determining those conclusions. Johnson (1987) identified several key questions to

consider in educational research: ". . . how accurately do perceptions portray reality? and are perceptions shaped by identifiable and commonly occurring factors?" (p. 209). For example, not everyone is in agreement with expanded definitions of school violence. West (1993) stated that such broad definitions of violence serve to distort and unduly escalate the "moral panic" associated with school violence discussions. Wayson (1985) suggested that much of the hysteria has come from grouping behavioral or discipline problems together with crime and violence. As a result, violence prevention initiatives can often fail because schools have inappropriately identified "violent behaviors" that are not addressed by the program they implement (Wilson-Brewer et al., 1991).

Compounding this problem is the fact that few violence prevention programs and strategies have been formally evaluated (Aleem, 1993; Wilson-Brewer et al., 1991) even in provinces such as Ontario, which embarked on an aggressive school violence campaign in 1993. As a result, principals can find themselves in the position of making decisions based on little empirical evidence. Choosing effective programs and providing adequate resources to implement these programs are important components of dealing with school violence (Hamilton, Hare, Hierlihy, & Kilbourn, 1994). However, I believe that the influences on the choices made and the processes used in making these choices are important variables that have been neglected in previous research.

In conversations with principals from all divisions (elementary, junior high, and senior high schools) the consensus was that violent behaviors were most predominant at the junior high level. This view supported national data (e.g., Walker, 1994; Day et al., 1995) suggesting that teenagers between the ages of 12 to 17 represented the largest

percentage of perpetrators of violent crime. The discussion above and my own interest in the junior high school milieu led to the research questions investigated in this study.

The Problem

The problem identified was: "How do junior high school principals influence violence prevention and reduction in their schools?"

Subproblems

To better understand the factors that influenced principals in their selection of programs, practices and strategies directed at the prevention and response to school violence, five subproblems were addressed in this study. These were:

1. How do principals describe the issue of school violence as they frame it in their schools?
2. What influences principals to adopt new strategies to address school violence?
3. What are the relationships among principals' experiences, their definitions of violence, their expectations of schools, and their chosen response to school violence?
4. What processes are involved in decisions related to school violence?
5. To what extent are responses to school violence considered to be effective by principals and the literature?

Purpose of the Study

Bibby and Posterski (1992) suggested that schools are one of the only remaining stable institutions left in society. They argued that it is for this reason that schools have

been delegated the task of dealing with a range of societal issues (e.g., AIDS awareness, drinking and driving campaigns, cultural tolerance), not the least of which is youth violence. Whereas educators are not prepared to take responsibility for eliminating violence from society, there is a clear view that teachers and principals have a legal and moral duty to maintain "discipline and order" as mandated in provincial school acts.

Although there is agreement that the sources of youth violence are complex and multi-faceted (e.g., Schmidt, Paquette, & Dickinson, 1990) there is less consensus regarding which criteria should be used in determining the most effective responses. Criminologists and police, for example, believe that the swiftness and certainty of punishment are more influential than the severity of the punishment (Gabor, 1995). And yet, teachers' federations (e.g., British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994) and school boards (e.g., Alberta School Boards Association, 1993) have lobbied the government to stiffen penalties for perpetrators of violence (e.g., Bill C-37). Zero tolerance policies, which seek to punish or suppress serious disruptive or violent behaviors, are gaining popularity at a time when boards are also being encouraged to adopt alternatives-to-suspensions programs (Day et al., 1995).

A 1994 nationwide survey in the United States (Honeywell, 1994) revealed that over 80 percent of the teachers (n=258) suggested solutions to school violence could be realized through improved parenting skills, smaller class sizes, and stricter discipline practices. For each of these strategies there are numerous programs and resources available which schools can choose from. As primary resource allocators, principals play

an important role in making such choices. However, as Lashway (1996) suggested, "we know very little about how principals make strategic choices" (p. 5).

The purpose of this research was to explore those variables which influenced principals' decisions regarding policies, programs, and strategies to deal with school violence at the junior high school level. By studying individual (internal) and societal (external) influences which guide principals' decisions in dealing with school violence, it was hoped that the rationale behind the directions schools are taking in their efforts to deal with this complex issue could be made explicit. The extent and the manner in which principals address issues of school violence lie at the core of this dissertation. Understanding why resources were allocated or policy decisions made, may serve to enhance future understandings of the effectiveness of violence prevention initiatives in schools.

Significance of the Research

On a regular basis, principals are faced with a broad range of decisions that can influence school effectiveness. One can point to any number of studies which attempt to shed light on the processes involved in these decisions (e.g., Conway, 1984; Kasten & Ashbaugh, 1988; Lashway, 1996; Leithwood & Stager, 1989). Hodgkinson (1991), for example, proposed that there exists a hierarchy of value-types consisting of: (a) social norms, (b) preferences, and (c) principles. He believed that how one positions these values, and resolves any value conflicts that emerge, is central to the decision-making process. Johnson (1987) wrote of the role that perceptions play in shaping decisions. He believed that perceptions play an important role in the way individuals construct their

interpretations of reality. Furthermore, in the absence of requisite information, decisions are made solely on the basis of either invalid assumptions or a distorted sense of reality (p. 210).

Although the number of available violence prevention resources is expanding, reasons for the success or failure of these initiatives is not well documented. This is primarily due to the difficulties associated with: (a) conducting longitudinal studies, (b) movement of problems off school grounds, (c) difficulties in assessing students' attitudes, (d) multiple factors outside of the school's control affecting violence, and (e) the many variables which influence successful program implementation . Even fewer data are available which offer insights into why such programs or strategies were introduced.

The practical significance of this study resides in the potential for the results to identify which areas of professional development (e.g., acquiring skills and knowledge) would be of most benefit to principals in their decisions regarding strategies aimed at maintaining a safe teaching and learning environment in their schools. If such decisions have not been based on empirical data, researchers could better identify future areas for study.

The findings of this study are significant for those involved in linking research to policy making decisions, including:

1. Principals, who interpret and put into practice district goals (e.g., safe schools);
2. School board members, who identify and oversee policy issues (e.g., zero tolerance);
3. Researchers, who accumulate and disseminate a body of knowledge which informs practice (e.g., effectiveness of violence prevention programs).

From a theoretical perspective, this study both challenged and reaffirmed current thinking in the areas of leadership, decision-making, and school culture. It did so by considering the roles that values, assumptions, biases, and perceptions played in the decisions related to school violence. The findings positioned the elements of such decisions within the larger context of leadership and school effectiveness. By establishing linkages among principal leadership, decision making, and school violence initiatives, this study offered theoretical insights that have not been addressed in prior research.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of consistent understanding of terminology used in this dissertation, the following terms are defined: (a) junior high school, (b) strategies, (c) leadership, and (d) violence.

Junior High School

"Junior high school" refers to those schools offering instructional programs in grades 7, 8, and 9, as authorized by the provincial Department of Education to students.

Strategies

Throughout this document, references are made to "strategies" which principals consider in relation to addressing school violence. This term is used in the broadest of contexts to include: resources, policies, staffing changes, communications, to name a few elements. Wherever necessary and when relevant to the discussion, this term will be expanded and refined.

Leadership

Studies in organizational theory have offered a number of distinctions between terms such as: leadership, administration, and management. In the context of this study, Zaleznik's (1977) work is particularly useful to clarify how leadership was viewed. He suggested that leaders: (a) are advocates for change, (b) applied creative problem-solving techniques without an aversion towards conflict that could result, and (c) encouraged and engaged in intense working relationships.

Violence

From the point of view of a teacher or school administrator, school violence could encompass those behaviors which seriously disrupt the safe learning environment of a classroom or school. It would include "anything that affronts a child or teacher or staff member's ability to function in a safe, conducive learning environment" (Wiseman, 1993, p. 3). This is a much broader definition than that found in legal contexts. There are examples throughout the literature which position "violence" on various points of a continuum ranging from severe criminal acts (e.g., assault) to disruptive and inappropriate behavior (e.g., profanity).

This study will further explore definitions of violence from the literature and my own experiences. Furthermore, how principals conceptualize violence constitutes an important subproblem explored in the study. In the end, it is hoped that a relevant definition of violence will emerge from the data.

Delimitations

Due to nature of the research questions identified in this study, the source, analysis and synthesis of data were delimited as follows:

1. In order to increase the likelihood that participants were knowledgeable in the field of school violence and had made recent decisions in this area, a respondent group of 12 principals was purposefully selected on the basis of being identified as having experience and exemplary success in school violence initiatives.
2. For the purpose of convenience, and consistency in the criteria used to select principals (i.e., one senior administrator was requested to make the selections), the participants were chosen from one large public school system located in Western Canada.
3. Statistics Canada data, provided by Day et al. (1995), indicated that "23 % of all violence crime victims were teenagers between 12 and 19 years" (p.10). Walker's study on weapons use in Canadian schools found that 42 percent of police agencies polled, reported seizing knives on school property from youth aged 12 to 17 years. These ages are represented in grades 7 to 12 in Alberta schools. In conversations with principals from all divisions (elementary, junior high, and senior high schools) the consensus was that violent behaviors were most predominant at the junior high level. For this reason, it was felt that junior high school principals would be most familiar with the issues of school violence. Consequently, the study was delimited to only that group.
4. The literature that guided the study, the focus of investigation, the analysis and interpretation of findings, were drawn from North American sources. This was a

deliberate delimitation intended to focus on those studies which most closely paralleled the social, economic, and political environments of Alberta.

5. Decision making and school violence are broad topics in and of themselves. This study was thus confined to only three of many possible areas: (a) the ways in which principals framed the problem of school violence, (b) how they perceived their role in addressing such issues, and (c) what variables influenced the decision-making process which they chose to follow.

Limitations

According to Gall, Borg, and Borg (1996) the use of interviews presents a concern over possible subjectivity and bias. In particular, the use of leading questions and unspecified frames of reference can result in invalid responses. To address concerns regarding leading or ambiguous questions, a pilot study was used to pretest the interview questions. The results of this pilot are discussed in Chapter 3.

Additional limitations are stated as follows:

1. The study was limited by the opinion of one informant source whose opinion it was that these 12 principals were exemplary leaders.
2. The study was limited by access to only a number of school documents as were provided by those principals who chose to produce them.
3. The study was limited by the depth of information and insights shared during the course of only one interview.

4. The study was limited by the failure to obtain a balanced view of whether other school community members (e.g., students, parents, staff) agreed that the principal was an exemplary leader, successful in the area of school violence.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the study, the problem addressed, and the significance of the research. In addition, relevant definitions, delimitations, and limitations are presented.

Chapter 2 offers a review of relevant literature divided into six interrelated areas: (a) describing school violence - an evolution of terms, (b) the school violence movement, (c) the nature and extent of school violence, (d) the role of school personnel, (e) strategies for dealing with school violence, and (f) decision making. The prior research in the area of school violence and issues of leadership and decision making that helped to guide the theoretical framework of this study are also presented.

The research design and the theoretical stance which guided the data collection and analysis are reported in the third chapter of the dissertation. This chapter also addresses the ethical considerations and demographic information regarding the participants.

Chapter 4 provides a description of the findings, which are based on the data collected from the 12 interviews conducted with junior high school principals. The findings are organized according to the subproblems identified in Chapter 1.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the findings and offers insights into the relationships between the theory and literature reviewed. From a synthesis of the findings

and the discussion of the findings emerged the conclusions, recommendations, and the implications of the study presented in Chapter 6. The seventh, and final chapter, entitled: "Personal Reflections" explores current directions in the area of school violence vis-à-vis broader questions regarding the schooling of today's youth. Insights into aspects of leadership are also discussed.

Summary

School violence is a topic that has drawn media attention (e.g., Onstad, 1997; Stewart, 1995) and formed the basis of numerous school initiatives in Canada (e.g., Alberta Education, 1994; British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994; New Brunswick Teachers' Federation, 1979). A wide range of strategies have emerged, ranging from zero tolerance policies to the introduction of conflict management skills into the curriculum. As more schools embrace the need to deal with violent behaviors, practice has often preceded research, in large part because of the difficulties associated with evaluating a complex social issue such as violence and the demands of parents and the public for "quick action."

Principals, in particular, are faced with the challenge to respond to growing pressures to provide students and staff with a safe teaching and learning environment. The problem is: How do junior high school principals influence violence prevention and reduction in their schools? This study was intended to: (a) determine which new initiatives, programs, and practices principals consider when addressing school violence; (b) explore the factors which influence such choices; and (c) compare the effectiveness

of violence prevention strategies chosen by principals in the study to those presented in the literature.

It was felt that insights gained from this study would be instrumental in determining which attitudes and conditions most influence response, intervention, and prevention of school violence. Expanding current perspectives of how principals respond to increased public pressure to address school-based violence was deemed an important aspect of this research. In turn, substantive theories emerging from the data offer a contribution to the literature by linking decision-making and school violence, thus introducing a perspective that does not currently exist. It is for this reason that the next chapter presents a review of literature related to two bodies of knowledge: school violence and decision making.

Chapter 2

ACT II

Scene I: Friday afternoon, Supleh High School

The afternoon lingered for what seemed like forever. "Fridays were brutal," Eneri thought. This weekend, plans for relaxation had been made: a movie, a good book, perhaps a stroll through the park. Casting a quick glance towards the window, she saw dark clouds forming in the distance. "Perhaps the winds will shift and we'll have a good weekend afterall," she hoped. As her gaze shifted, from the corner of one eye Eneri saw two cars race into and out of the parking lot. Just a flash of colour: perhaps a red or burgundy Mazda, a black Nissan . . . it was hard to tell. Whomever was driving each vehicle was in a BIG hurry! "Maybe just a couple of kids with spares in their last period, in a hurry to leave for the weekend," she mused. "I really should talk about the driving habits of students in the next assembly," Eneri promised herself.

Just then, Cam walked through the door carrying an onerous looking stack of papers, forms, and whatnot. "So, are you ready to go over the latest budget figures?" he asked. "Oh, by the way, I got the license numbers of those Indy drivers of ours out in the parking lot. You saw them I suppose?" he continued. "Sort of. What are you proposing to do with the license numbers?" Eneri asked. "Now, don't you worry about a thing. I have it all planned out. I'll deal with that issue, if you could just get this stuff out of the way and couriered back to the District office ASAP"

Scene II: On a road a few kilometers from Supleh High School

It was one of the scariest moments of his life. Don could barely hold onto the wheel of the car, what with his perspiring hands and all. He continued to glance into his rear view mirror, hoping that he had lost them. "Now, where do I go?" he thought to himself. "And how did they know which school I went to?" "Damn, will this never end!" Confused, fear clouding his reflexes, Don continued to drive hoping that somewhere he would come upon a speed trap. "Where are those cops when you really need them? I need help so badly," he thought to himself.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature reviewed in this chapter is divided into six areas, namely: (a) describing school violence - an evolution of terms, (b) the school violence movement, (c) the nature and extent of school violence, (d) the role of school personnel, (e) strategies for dealing with school violence, and (f) decision making.

The chapter concludes with the synthesis of a theoretical framework based on the themes. This framework then forms the basis for the analysis and synthesis of the data collected in the study.

Describing School Violence: An Evolution of Terms

The meaning of school violence has gradually evolved beyond definitions found in the *Criminal Code*. From the point of view of teachers or school administrators, Wiseman (1993) suggested that school violence encompassed those behaviors which seriously disrupted the safe learning environment of a classroom or school. It included "anything that affronts a child or teacher or staff member's ability to function in a safe, conducive learning environment" (p. 3). Although there is some disagreement (e.g., Wall, 1995; West, 1993), the prevailing view of school violence is that it embodies a continuum of behaviors which can result in either physical or psychological harm. The following are a few examples of definitions: (a) "all physical and nonphysical acts that are seriously harmful to others, unjust and/or unlawful" (Alberta Education, 1993a, p. 5), and (b) ". . . the threat or use of force that injures or intimidates a person [makes them feel afraid]" (British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994, p. 4).

Expanding the definition of violence resulted in a myriad of behaviors and activities that some researchers (e.g., Dolmage, 1996) considered "disruptive," but not necessarily "violent." This has led to a debate regarding the perceived nature and extent of violence in schools. Ten years ago, some American educators were expressing concerns regarding this issue, suggesting that grouping behavioral or discipline problems together with crime and violence would lead to public hysteria (Wayson, 1985). Schools would be viewed as "hotbeds" of violence, thus providing politicians and the media with tremendous opportunities to fuel public fears.

Student discipline problems were not always considered "violent" behaviors. For example, in the seventies, an Alberta task force termed punching, acts of vandalism, fighting, swearing, and back talk as *discipline* problems. In the United States however, amidst the growing racial tensions resulting from desegregation, educators (e.g., Marvin, McCann, Connolly, Temkin, & Henning, 1976) were beginning to use "school violence" to describe criminal activities that occurred at school: gang wars, illicit drug use, vandalism, weapon possession, and personal assault.

In Canada, a similar phenomenon was appearing. The 1981 Canadian issue of *Today* alarmed its readers with statistics on the costs to taxpayers of vandalism in Vancouver schools. The article suggested that Canadian schools were in trouble, experiencing increased delinquency amongst their students. Within a decade of the publication of this article, vandalism was considered to be not only a delinquent behavior, but also a "violent" one (e.g., MacDougall, 1993). In 1993, the *Toronto Star* published results of an Environics poll which indicated that more respondents were concerned about

violence in schools than academic standards (cited in MacDougall, 1993). One of the shortcomings of drawing conclusions from such a poll was that the underlying causes for these perceptions were not explored. For example, it is not known if concerns over violence stemmed from: (a) an increase in the number of incidents, (b) increased intolerance for behaviors previously ignored or accepted, or (c) labeling what was previously considered delinquent behavior as "violent."

A "delinquent" youth, for example, is defined as one who "fails to perform a duty or commits a fault" (Funk & Wagnall's Standard Desk Dictionary, 1993). Using such a broad definition, it is not surprising that youth delinquency is not just a phenomenon of this decade. The Toronto police chief wrote in his Annual Report dated 1890: "Vagrant bands parading the streets at night have given the police a good deal of trouble, composed as they are, of rowdy youths belonging to no responsible society or organization" (cited in Onstad, 1997).

Towards the end of the 1970s youth delinquency again became a public issue of crisis proportions. Doob, Marinos, and Varma (1995) linked this to studies that did not account for legislative changes that had taken place in Canada. They attributed the public's concern over the sudden increase in youth offenses, as stemming from the inclusion of 16 and 17 year olds in the data - offenders who had been tracked under adult crime statistics prior to the *Young Offenders Act* (1985). A similar pattern of misperception exists today, he believes. Doob, Marinos, and Varma (1995) argued that the most recent wave of public concern over youth "crime" has also arisen from zero-tolerance policies in schools which delegated incidents of misbehavior and delinquency

(e.g., throwing snowballs, mischief, playground fights) to police and the judicial system. In an interview printed in *Saturday Night*, Doob suggested that: "our greatest mistake is in treating what is really a social problem as a criminal-justice matter" (Onstad, 1997, p. 58).

Today, fewer schools are using the term "violence" to describe unacceptable behaviors. Perhaps this has been due to the negative image of educational institutions that the term "school violence" elicited, or the frustration some educators (e.g., Dolmage, 1996) publicly expressed regarding the media-hyped, overstated problem of violence in Canadian schools. Delinquency, as does violence, conjures images of criminality and deviance that are deemed beyond the purview of schools. However, the more prevalent term, "disruptive behaviors," has repositioned the issue as an educational one. As opposed to violence, which deals with victims and perpetrators, disruptive behaviors affect the process of learning and teaching. The continuum of behaviors that can meet the criteria of "disrupting" schools is as, if not more, expansive than violent behaviors, with the difference being that disruption is less prone to media attention.

As Mawhinney (1995) suggested in her analysis of school violence policies in Ontario, policy solutions are grounded in how the problem is defined. One could further argue that consistency is not prevalent in defining school violence in Canadian schools. It appears critical, therefore, that any policies and practices which address school violence be rooted in unambiguous and consistent definitions of the very behaviors and activities they seek to prevent or respond to. A synthesis of prior research (e.g., MacDonald, 1995), a review of the literature, and personal experiences, have led me to develop a definition of

violence that I will use throughout this document. It describes several key components that address the behavior, the motive, and the outcome:

> Violence is the actual or threatened use of physical, verbal, sexual, or emotional power, intimidation, harassment, by or against individuals or groups which results in physical or psychological harm, or both, or is harmful to the social well-being of an individual or group. (MacDonald, 1997c)

The School Violence Movement

Between the mid-seventies and early nineties, the problem of student misbehavior had evolved from issues of "discipline" to issues of "violence prevention." In 1975 the growing concern in Alberta about school vandalism, poor standards of behavior and the belief by many teachers that lack of discipline was interfering with teaching, led to a study sponsored by the Alberta Ministry of Education, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and the Provincial Trustees Association. Over 5,000 people participated in the study, including parents, trustees, support staff, and students from across the province. The results suggested that there were mixed views regarding the adequacy of school discipline, the use of corporal punishment, and the underlying reasons for discipline problems among students (Clarke, 1977). Large class sizes, large schools, lack of extra-curricular activities, uninteresting work, and heavy teacher workloads were considered by many participants to be factors which influenced student behavior. Underlying causes for lack of discipline were described as: (a) lack of respect for authority, (b) poor attitudes among young people, (c) lack of discipline at home, and (d) poor student-teacher relations.

Four years later the New Brunswick Teachers' Federation (1979) collected data from provincial teachers' associations across Canada on the issue of school violence and discipline. The submission from Alberta stated:

> There is no evidence of any such increase [in school violence]. We believe that if there has been any significant increase more teachers would have been complaining to us on this topic. Such has not happened. In addition, the Alberta Teachers' Association has no evidence that student violence directed at students is a serious problem. (p. 20)

Similarly, the government of Alberta's response was that "it would appear that the matter of violence in schools may be dealt with quite appropriately under the *Criminal Code*" (New Brunswick Teachers' Federation, 1979, p.20).

In the years that followed, public fora across Canada (e.g., Alberta Education, 1993a, 1994; British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994; New Brunswick Teachers' Federation, 1979) were held to understand the phenomenon of school violence and to identify potential strategies that would ensure safe schools. The federal government also became more involved by funding research on youth violence through the Solicitor General's *Brighter Futures Initiative*. The earlier work was primarily focused on better understanding the nature and extent of the problem. The data that were collected from teachers, parents, and police pointed to a broad spectrum of "violent" behaviors that were causing concern within and beyond Canadian schools (Mathews, 1994; Pepler & Craig, 1994; Ryan, Mathews, & Banner, 1993; Walker, 1994).

Teachers became increasingly vocal about what they perceived to be a dramatic increase in aggressive behaviors in schools. In 1992, the Alberta Teachers' Association suggested policies for dealing with violence in schools. Of the ten recommendations for action, eight addressed response to student behavior, and two encouraged the communication of discipline policies to parents and students. Neither violence-prevention nor the teaching of pro-social behaviors to students were offered as measures to address violence in schools (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1992). One year later, the Association urged the Department of Education to establish a task force that would investigate the issue of violence in schools (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1994).

In 1995, Wall's study of 29 schools - 1 junior high, 2 senior high, 5 elementary-junior high, 4 elementary-junior-senior high, and 17 elementary schools in Alberta concluded that rates of school violence were low. His work focused on only those incidents which were reported to principals of participant schools over a two-week period. In Wall's study, data were not gathered on the basis of either observation or student reporting. His conclusion, like that of Dolmage (1996), was that school-based violence had been largely exaggerated and precipitated by "self-serving research such as teacher opinion polls" (p. 22).

Interestingly, Webber's (1995) study of issues facing 76 of Alberta's superintendents, found that school violence, vandalism, and racism were of a low priority. Rather, their primary concerns focused on future planning requirements and decreased funding for education. Johnson and Holdaway's (1991) work with Alberta principals found that, of the 29 effectiveness dimensions provided to participants (n=196), "adapting

policies and procedures to respond to external changes and expectations" was listed as 27th in importance. "Enlisting support of the non-parental community" was last (29th). Within a span of six years, Alberta's principals were expressing a great interest in obtaining any information or resources possible from its member association to deal with violence in schools (Alberta Teachers' Association, 1997). Of the 275 principals who responded, 63 percent were "very interested" in violence issues in schools, and 47 percent indicated that they used some form of violence prevention programs. Sixty percent stated that they did not have a violence prevention policy in their schools.

The province of Ontario's Ministry of Education and Training (1994) introduced a *Violence-free Schools Policy*, to which several districts responded by adopting zero tolerance practices, which effectively suspended or expelled students for acts of violence (e.g., possession of a weapon). The policy document outlined provisions in the *Education Act* for the suspension and expulsion of students, adding that: "Specific disciplinary action by the principal or the school board resulting from a violent incident is therefore not dealt with in this document" (Ontario Ministry of Education & Training, 1994, p. 32). To add to the confusion, Ontario also amended the *Education Act* to stipulate that all school boards report annually to the Ministry all incidents of violence which resulted in a student's suspension or expulsion. The only criterion for determining whether an incident was violent, was whether it led to a suspension, or expulsion, or a call to the police.

A 1995 survey of police services and school boards across Canada (Gabor) found that 80 percent of respondents felt that there was more violence in schools now than what

existed 10 years ago. Thirty percent considered the situation "much worse" and none believed that the incidence of school violence was lessening. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation's survey (cited in British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994) of secondary students indicated that violence and drugs were two of the most commonly cited weaknesses of public schooling The task force recommended that the government require school boards to develop, implement, and submit to the Ministry, policies, regulations, and procedures aimed at eliminating school violence. In addition, the report urged the Ministry of Education to implement a standardized method of collecting and reporting incidents of violence in schools. To date, these recommendations have not been acted upon, primarily as a result of the Ontario's similar model's failure to achieve expected results.

In Alberta, Section 19(1.1) of *Bill 19* (1994) provided principals with a high degree of discretionary authority. Seen as a response to the growing demands by school boards to broaden their powers to effectively respond to violent students, Bill 19 amended the Alberta *School Act* to allow principals to "suspend or expel a student for any reason considered appropriate." A private member's bill *(Bill 206)* introduced in 1994 (Alberta Hansard, 1994a) attempted to further expand the types of student behaviors that would result in school sanction. After its first reading in the legislature the bill was deferred for further study and, up to this time, has not been reintroduced.

A review of recent Canadian literature suggests that, once again, schools are demonstrating a shift in attitudes regarding school violence. Behaviors that were considered "discipline problems" in the 1970s, and "school violence" in the early 1990s,

are now termed "disruptive." For example, in a Canadian Education Association Report titled: *Violence in the Schools*, MacDougall (1993) began his section on "Violence Against Teachers and Students" with the following statement: " Increasingly, teachers find themselves faced with students who are angry, disrespectful and abusive" (p. 15). He continued by providing readers with the results of studies in Canada which pointed to increases in "verbal and physical assaults in schools" (p. 16). These incidents, he believed, were instrumental in escalating the concerns raised by teachers and parents as to the safety of Canadian schools.

Recent initiatives (Alberta Education, 1996) and school resource guides (Canadian Education Association, 1996) are now framing these same issues of violent student behavior as "disruptive." The Canadian Education Association's most recent report (1996) begins by stating that "both educators themselves and the general public see disruptive student behavior as a major concern in schools today" (p. 2). The authors used the following definition from Canter and Canter (1993) to explain this new perspective: "Difficult students are students who are continually disruptive, persistently defiant, demanding of attention or unmotivated" (p. 3). The report uses examples such as: breaking rules, lack of self-discipline, and disturbing classroom learning, to illustrate disruptive behavior.

Unlike the initiatives introduced a few years ago (e.g., *Violence-free schools policy*, Ontario Ministry of Education & Training, 1994), more recent strategies have underplayed the term "violence." For example, Alberta's Department of Education, the provincial Teachers' Association, and university faculties of education began a three-year

project in 1996 designed to develop materials for use by students, parents, guardians, and teachers to deal with student aggression and its victims. This initiative, was deliberately titled "Safe and Caring Schools" so that educators and the public could focus on the type of school environment they wish to build, rather that reiterating the inappropriate behaviors they wish to eliminate or are prepared to punish (e.g., MacDonald, 1997b).

Since the project began, the response, from principals especially, has been overwhelming. They have requested information ranging from the use of surveillance cameras in schools, student identification tags, anger management programs, and the availability of police resource officers. These inquiries have come, despite claims (e.g., Dolmage, 1996; Wall, 1995; Webber, 1994) that school violence is an exaggerated and low-key problem. It is not known how much of this recent interest has been sparked by actual incidents, a perceived need, or by political pressure.

The Nature and Extent of School Violence

The increased concern over school violence and serious disruptive behaviors has initiated somewhat sporadic Canadian research about the nature and extent of the problem. The Smith et al. (1995) study of 962 junior and senior high school students in Calgary, identified nine types of victimizations: "something damaged, something stolen, something taken by force, threatened, slapped or kicked, threatened with weapon, attacked by group/gang, someone exposed themselves [sic], sexually touched against will." Of these, something stolen (55.6%), something damaged (43.6%), being threatened

(42.3%), and being slapped or kicked (37.1%) were the most prevalent victimizations identified amongst students.

A survey of 231 Edmonton area junior high school students (MacDonald, 1995) found that over one-half of students had experienced physical forms of violence (e.g., fights, bullying, punching, hitting, grabbing), verbal threats, and theft or damage of property. One-fifth of male students indicated that they had been threatened with a weapon at school. Sexual harassment was experienced by over 25 percent of female students and ethnic conflict affected one-quarter of the student participants. Despite the fact that only 4 percent of students responded that they never felt safe at school, 20 percent of students had observed weapons at school and over 50 percent considered bullying to be " big" or "very big" problems.

It could be argued that social problems seen in schools merely reflect what is occurring in society. Indeed, some educators contend that youth violence is a problem more prevalent in the larger community than in schools. Research findings (e.g., Smith et al., 1995) point to empirical data against this view. With the exception of weapons threats and being attacked by a gang or group, all victimization rates were higher while at school than while not at school.

The Role of School Personnel

Despite differing views on the nature and extent of school violence, there is a general consensus that schools must provide students with a safe learning environment. What is not as readily agreed upon, is what constitutes school violence and who is ultimately responsible for addressing the root causes of violent behaviors in schools.

Under the premise that school violence simply mirrors societal violence, Schmidt, Paquette, and Dickinson (1990) argued that schools cannot be expected to solve all of the ills of society. At the same time, they can neither abdicate legal and moral responsibility nor ignore the influence schools play in the lives of young people.

Although there is continued pressure for the government to impose tougher regulations or legislation to effectively deal with violent incidents at schools (e.g., Alberta Hansard, 1995, 1996), there is nothing in case law or current statutes which precludes schools from doing so. In Alberta, for example, Section 19 of the *School Act* provides for the suspension or expulsion of students "for any other reason the teacher, the principal, or the board as the case may be, considers appropriate." Section 43 of the *Criminal Code* of Canada (1985) states that "every schoolteacher, parent or person standing in the place of a parent is justified in using force by way of correction toward a pupil or child, as the case may be, who is under his care, if the force does not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances" (1985).

The most recent concern of educators, regarding the sharing of information on violent offenders, was addressed in the amendments to the *Young Offenders Act (Bill C-37, 1994)*. Effectively, disclosure of information as amended in s.38, is no longer for the sole purpose of ensuring compliance with an order of the court. Rather, information regarding a violent student can be disclosed if deemed necessary to ensure safety of staff, students, or others.

In all actions taken to enforce school rules, it is assumed that school authorities will follow the fundamental principles of justice. These principles were defined by Justice

Fauteux in R. v. Duke (1972) to mean that those who adjudicate must act fairly, in good faith, without bias and in a judicial temper, giving offenders the opportunity to adequately state their case. For example, in advance of exercising authority to suspend, students affected by the rules must be made aware of those behaviors or conduct that are prohibited. The rules must be stated in an unambiguous manner so that there is a clear understanding of the unacceptability and consequences of failure to comply with the code of behavior. At the same time, school authorities must follow due process and provide students with the opportunities to present their sides of the story.

Strategies to Deal with School Violence

Although there is general agreement that the sources of youth violence are complex and multi-faceted, there is less consensus regarding which criteria should be used in determining the most effective responses. Criminologists and police, for example, believe that the swiftness and certainty of punishment are more influential than the severity of the punishment (Gabor, 1995). And yet, teachers' federations (e.g., British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994) and school boards (e.g., Alberta School Boards Association, 1993) have lobbied the government to stiffen penalties for perpetrators of violence. Zero tolerance policies, which seek to punish or suppress serious disruptive or violent behaviors, are gaining popularity at a time when boards are being encouraged to adopt alternatives-to-suspensions programs (Day et al., 1995).

Resources could be allocated to encourage programs and practices which focus on the prevention of serious disruptive behaviors, and the rehabilitation of those students who are affected by such behaviors. In contrast to initiatives aimed at promoting pro-

social behaviors, principals can elect to concentrate their school's efforts on a punitive model, designed to control and discipline disruptive behaviors, or increased monitoring of student behavior, through such measures as surveillance cameras.

In the United States, a number of researchers (e.g., Shostak, 1986; Yonker, 1983) began to link violence as an outcome of disruptive behavior that had been ignored, or attributed to inappropriate causes. They accused schools of failing to deal with the underlying causes for disruptive behaviors, choosing to reprimand or remove such students, rather than take the time to identify what caused the disruption: "The factors of fear, threat, negative attitudes, bored students and the power struggle between students and school staff have directly contributed to disruptive behavior in the classroom" (Yonker, 1983, p. 126). Hargreaves, Earl, and Ryan (1996) suggested that factors such as the inability of schools to adapt to the unique needs of adolescents have resulted in a failure to address either their emotional or academic needs:

> When young teenagers yearn for greater independence, we tighten the screws of classroom control. When they are most in need of care and support to guide them through the turbulent years leading to adulthood, we focus on teaching subject matter. . . and leave students' emotional needs to the peer group and gang (p. 159).

In his text on ethics, Peters (1966) offered a similar observation, suggesting that boredom was the most prevalent cause of disorder, fueled by students feeling more as spectators than active participants in a shared endeavor (p. 279).

Coulby and Harper (1985) stated that "there is no such thing as a disruptive child. Certain pupils behave disruptively in some lessons, with some teachers, in some

environments at certain times" (p. 3). This is a belief that is perhaps not shared by all principals. If, for example, only the behavior was considered to be disruptive, Coulby and Harper suggested that, through a concerted effort on the part of school staff to encourage pro-social behaviors, such disruptions could be eliminated. In contrast, a belief that students in and of themselves are disruptive, results in increased control, regimentation, and ultimately, the belief that schools can do little to remedy such behaviors, short of removal of the student from school. Interestingly, everyday school violence is attributed by some (e.g., Toby, 1993) to be caused, at least in part, by the educational policies and practices of schools which are under the leadership of the school principal.

In his study on the implications of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Gour (1988) tried to determine what the perceptions of Alberta educators (n=208) were regarding students' rights. Although 91.9 percent of respondent teachers (n=65) felt that they had the privilege of refusing to teach disruptive students, only 67.9 percent of principals (n=89) agreed. Principals were split on the issue of the explicit right of schools to use whatever measures were deemed necessary to control students (53.6 percent agreed, 46.4 percent disagreed). Comments of the respondents revealed that such decisions would have to be based on "reason," "legitimacy," or "whatever is necessary," thus demonstrating a range of personal beliefs rather than compliance with known regulations.

In a 1995 study (MacDonald) of 28 school administrators and 231 students in Alberta junior high schools, principals were not unanimous in their approaches of how to best deal with school violence. Of the comments received, 19 percent suggested a

community-based resolution; 26 percent, a need for a greater awareness of school violence; 31 percent advocated greater consequences for offenders; 23 percent of respondents sought a move towards a zero tolerance of school violence; and 42 percent felt solutions lay in more student rules and clearer behavior expectations. The following are examples of such contrasting views: (a) "Take a stand that students who seriously contravene the law and school regulations will lose their right to a public education. The safety of the majority far outweighs the rights of the serious violators" (p.69), and (b) "they [offenders] need to be given lots of encouragement and guidance to learn the skills required" (p. 69).

For the most part, principals have been taught to address student behavior using a traditional model of discipline: monitor, judge acceptability, and punish when necessary. Student behavior and discipline policies did not address the need to: (a) impart pro-social skills on students, (b) empower students to take responsibility for regulating their own behavior, and (c) encourage students to learn self-discipline (Reed & Strahan, 1995). Students learned that conflict resolution was best deferred to those in authority, the assumption being that pupil control was only possible by enforcing and maintaining order and discipline (Johnson & Johnson, 1995).

Unfortunately, measures to simply toughen discipline have often failed due to the inappropriate goal of controlling students rather than empowering them to control themselves. Current literature points to the disturbing conclusion that more control and discipline seem to exacerbate problems and lead to more school violence rather than safety (e.g., Dill & Haberman, 1995).

In their book, *Reclaiming youth at risk*: *Our hope for the future*, Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Brockern (1990) argued that too often, restrictive policies which simply aim to suspend or expel "problem" students, turn away those who most need an education. Furthermore, increased sanctions typically lead to an escalation of disruptive behaviors and fosters a school environment which is often perceived as uncaring (Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996; Weissglass, 1996) .

Despite the research which challenges punitive models, the most common response to the increase of school violence has been a "get-tough" stance. The numbers of expulsions and suspensions in schools has increased (Dupper & Bosch, 1996), the *Young Offenders Act* has been revised to stiffen penalties, a number of schools are investing in security and surveillance measures (e.g., Alberta Hansard, 1994, p. 2641), and some school authorities are revising student behavior policies to reflect what is known as zero tolerance attitudes (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education & Training, 1994). Many of these responses are considered "quick fixes" motivated more by political pressure than any empirical evidence of addressing the real issues related to violence in schools (Dolmage, 1996; Elliott, 1994). Furthermore, as Hoy and Miskel (1993) cautioned, rules need to allow for a variety of situations, and the latitude for discretionary judgment - both of which are lacking in zero tolerance policies. The more constrictive the formal structures are, the greater the likelihood that an informal organization emerges which will work around the official rules and procedures.

As continued research focuses more attention on the area of school violence, some schools are recognizing the increased need to review the effectiveness of past practices. In

such circumstances, principals have decided that reducing school violence should spawn efforts to introduce pro-social behavior more than emphasizing strategies to suppress delinquent behaviors (Ciminillo, 1980). Students, they believed, would need exposure to examples of acceptable behavior rather than be reminded of the list of behaviors that would result in punishment. Such initiatives have slowly evolved and include: (a) developing positive behavior programs that recognize the exemplary acts of students, (b) allocating resources that enable teachers to organize extra-curricular activities to promote a team environment amongst students, (c) promoting student involvement in behavior plan formulation, (d) initiating school programs that recognize community service as an integral contribution by students, and (e) supporting curriculum that teaches students the skills needed for peaceful and cooperative problem solving (Weissglass, 1996).

In order to be successful, many of these strategies have required the direct support and leadership of the school principal. Lieber and Rogers (1994) investigated the elements required to successfully implement good conflict resolution programs in schools. They found that the principal was pivotal in a number of ways: (a) as a catalyst for introducing programs, (b) determining what the staff needs were, and (c) demonstrating an ongoing commitment by "walking the talk." Furthermore, they found that, when initiatives did fail, it was often as a result of a leadership that was not willing to challenge the inappropriate behavior or teaching practices of its staff. One of the frustrations expressed by a participant of Lieber and Roger's study was that "teachers wanted crops without the plowing and rain, without thunder and lightening" (1994, p. 57).

Changing the overall climate was also recognized as a task often requiring extreme measures, such as replacing staff: "in a system where the gap between the stars and everyone else is immense, 5 days of training is not going to give teachers a new personality" (p. 60). In a 1994 report on Canadian violence prevention initiatives, Hamilton, Hare, Hierlihy, and Kilbourn observed that programs initiated through board directives or in response to a violent incident were not as successful as those developed by schools themselves. When there was a perceived need to influence school climate or culture so as to ensure a safer environment, the staff and students seemed to embrace initiatives more readily. However, as indicated in American studies as well (Aleem, 1993; Wilson-Brewer et al., 1991), little time was spent on evaluation of programs, and monitoring of outcomes was rare.

Decision Making

The solutions chosen to address a problem, as well as the intended purpose of such responses, are usually an aggregate of many perspectives and values (Hoy & Miskel, 1993). Personal experience, values, and knowledge, as well as social pressures play a very large role in what Sergiovanni (1992) termed the "mindscapes" of how we interpret and resolve problems. How values, life experiences, external pressures, or the interpretation of the issues influences decisions by administrators in the area of school violence remains unclear. In terms of substantive theory of this study, the question was: how and to what degree do internal and external influences shape principals' decisions in the area of school violence? As a larger theoretical issue, the question is whether substantive theory

developed from this study could have applicability in the area of decision making in more general terms.

The term "value" has had numerous connotations in the literature. Kasten and Ashbaugh (1988) considered values as a screen which would, as Lakomski (1985) suggested, act as selectors for our preferences and desires. These values represent fundamental tenets such as truth, respect for others, and compassion. In turn, our values determine how we reinterpret and order facts (Greenfield, 1985; Holmes, 1986). For a school principal, the often competing values of responsibility, fair play, rights, freedoms, and child advocacy can conflict with the demands of the law, the community, and what could be a different point of view expressed by research findings. So too, continued constraints on delivering quality, cost-effective education often demand choices between what is a fair, a just, a morally right or an economically appropriate decision. Increasingly, school administrators find themselves trying to balance often conflicting principles and competing interests in their efforts to achieve the "best" course of action, which meets the approval of their many publics.

Each of the participants in the school violence debate may hold common values or beliefs (e.g., justice, truth, forgiveness) regarding the treatment of the issues. The difficulty arises from the context and rank of priority each group places on commonly held values. This reordering and reinterpretation of beliefs and values can be very much in evidence in the choices that are made in addressing violence in school (e.g., rehabilitative, preventative, or punitive measures). At the start of this study, the degree to which these elements influenced decisions was unclear.

In the past five years, more researchers are encouraging the development of strategies which address positive and preventative practices, not just punitive responses (e.g., Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996; Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1994). For example, how and under what conditions schools can provide a safe and caring environment is becoming more the question, than revamping the mechanisms of maintaining discipline and order. Issues of fairness, and effectiveness are also being re-examined as the rights of the offenders compete with those of the majority of students who are not directly engaged in violent acts.

It is not known whether current responses by principals are influenced by a motivation to: (a) control students, or to empower students to control themselves; (b) address codes of behavior and discipline policies from the standpoint of benefiting all students, or the punishment of a few, or (c) responding to political pressure. Bareham and Clark (1994) pointed out, in their report for British Columbia's schools, that response to school violence must combine an obligation to deal fairly and effectively with both the victims and the perpetrators. Heath (1994) concurred, adding that responses to school violence require a commitment to address codes of behavior and discipline policies from a sense of compassion, not punishment, fear or retribution. In addressing school violence, there is a need to build common understandings of: (a) what schools are *trying* to achieve, (b) what they *are* achieving, (c) to what extent, (d) by what measure, and (e) using what means. Is the sudden resurgence of resources motivated by a perceived need or political pressures? Are principals exercising leadership in this area, or followership of media hype? How many strategies are born from the personal value system of these

principals, or from pedagogical perspectives? It is from within this framework of dialectic views, that the research question for this study emerged and is situated.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Lancy (1993) suggested that having a general theoretical framework which can provide guidelines for data collection, participant selection, or areas of literature to examine is different than looking for data that will confirm one's expectations or hypotheses. The "theoretical background . . .the context of [the] study, its rationale, and its significance" (p.7) preceded the building of substantive theory and the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 5. The theoretical framework that guided the design of this study was based on a review of predominantly North American literature, personal experience in prior studies, and personal involvement in provincial initiatives. Gaps in the literature offered an opportunity to better understand those factors which most influence principals in their selection of programs, practices and strategies directed at the prevention and response to school violence.

Choosing between punitive or preventative models, school or classroom initiatives, pre-packaged or customized resources, are examples of the range of decisions principals face in their efforts to respond to growing concerns over violence in schools. How do they choose? What influences such decisions? Are such decisions different than those they face on a daily basis? These are examples of the questions which germinated this study.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) also believed that personal experience and a review of the literature could guide the researcher in the integration of data and theory. The

theoretical framework is just that, and is based on Hocking and Caldwell's (1990) work which suggested the framework consist of:

> specific theories related to the problem;
>
> what is known about the problem from other empirical studies;
>
> important variables and how they related to the problem;
>
> what needs to be done to advance knowledge concerning the problem:
>
> and, specific populations of importance to the problem. (p. 7-8)

The theoretical framework (see Figure 1), which guided the conceptualization of decision making in this study, integrated both the processes involved as well as the influences that shaped and reshaped these processes. I suggest that personal perspectives on such issues as: (a) role definition, (b) criteria of effective schools, and (c) the rights of students, constitute "internal influences" which consciously or unconsciously affect principal's decisions regarding school violence prevention. So too, the environment in which principals operate (i.e., external influences) continually defines and redefines: (a) how they identify problems, (b) the degree to which they share leadership, (c) choices amongst alternatives, and (d) the rationalization of decisions. As suggested by Bolman and Deal (1992) external influences can be both structural (e.g., role definition, policy

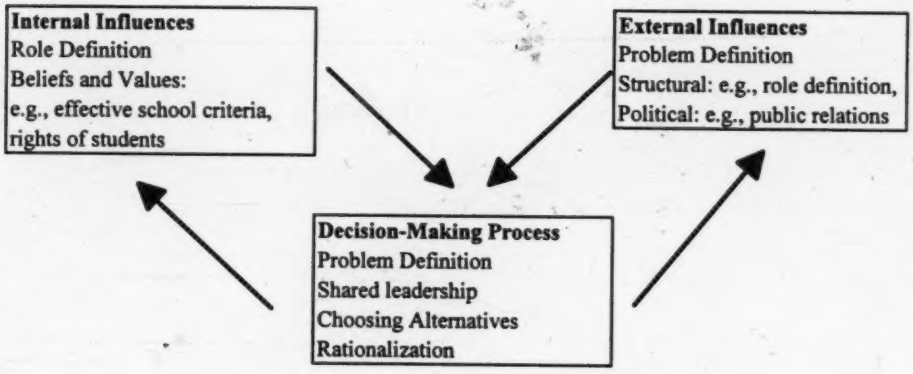

Figure 1. Tentative Theoretical Framework Conceptualizing Decision Making Processes

interpretation) and political (e.g., advocacy, public relations). This decision-making process is dynamic; the points of influence are many and contextual.

Assumptions Implicit in the Framework

As a key figure of authority, the principal can guide school initiatives which can, for example: (a) empower students to take responsibility for their behavior, or (b) increase school control through increased sanction and a greater punitive response. The questions which guided the interviews in this study were thus guided by a belief that principals make deliberate choices to address school violence and do so on the basis of many constructs. Furthermore, entering this study, it was my belief that the decisions they make have a profound effect on the school community. Deal and Peterson (1990) went so far as to suggest that principals were responsible for how others interpreted what was important in the life of the school. The choices they made and the behaviors they modeled played a critical role in what Starratt (1995) described as institutionalizing the vision and expressing the school's core values.

The "ideal" approach principals should follow in making strategic decisions can be inferred from the literature. Sergiovanni (1994), for example, suggested that leaders who recognized that values lie at the core of their decisions, exercised "moral leadership." Value-based decision making should thus consider the views of all members of the school community in the decision-making process. Unfortunately, if unmanaged, such shared leadership can often lead to inaction, as the desire to reach consensus impedes implementation (Deal & Peterson, 1994).

In relation to school violence, Kadel and Follam (1994) maintained that the principal plays a key role in creating a school climate and culture that rejects violent behaviors. In Florida, Kadel and Follam noted a reduction in antisocial behaviors in those schools whose principals maintained a high profile and placed a high priority on establishing caring relationships with the staff and students. In their view, successful principals make the effort to build relationships with their students, and are seen as visible leaders, who take the time to know the school community.

The Process of Making Decisions

Increased concern over violence has challenged schools to determine how best to respond to and prevent violent behaviors amongst students. Particularly in those districts with site-based management, the leadership in this area has rested with the school principal. Often, decisions are made without the benefit of reflection, or sound guidance (Enns, 1981; Holmes, 1986; Walker, 1994).

Given parental and community pressure to deal with these issues, expediency is often the chosen course. Only a small number of administrators, who are pressured into "doing something" about school violence, have either the time or expertise to choose appropriate programs or evaluate their effectiveness (Posner, 1994). Greenfield (1991) argued that lack of time was not the only factor. Of greater influence, he believed, was the lack of moral reasoning applied in administrative decisions. Campbell's work (1994) supported Greenfield's observations and concluded that dilemmas, such as those faced in the disciplining of students, are too often addressed by using "ethically-neutral problem solving strategies" (p. 7). Hodgkinson (1991) identified this as a natural inclination to

resolve value conflict at the lowest level of value hierarchy (e.g., preferences). For example, the value-laden dilemma to balance the needs of student victims and perpetrators of violence becomes relegated to following district policy (e.g., zero tolerance) rationalized as the removal of "bad" students for the sake of the rest of the school.

Campbell's study (1994) suggested that administrators often framed dilemmas as managerial, not ethical or moral. They, therefore, approached problems on the level of "conflict resolution strategies, consequences of efficiency and effectiveness, community and public relations schemes, procedural guidelines, and formative directives" (p.7). For those principals who are personally committed to addressing the needs of all students, they are often faced with having to set aside their ethical reasoning and answer to laws, policies, and duties that are externally imposed. Marshall (1992) explained this as "the fundamental chronic tensions in public schooling" (p. 381).

At some point in the cognitive process, a decision is reached and it is at this stage that language gives meaning and context to the decision. Decisions can be rationalized using expressions such as "I had no choice," "its what my gut tells me is right," or "I did what you told me to." As one principal stated in Campbell's study (1994), "I have to make a fast decision before I get confused by all my conflicting values" (p. 8). For others, it is easier to defend value-laden decisions objectively. Avoidance of personal or emotional factors reduces choices to a more logical and rational level (Newsome & Gentry, 1983, p.143). The language of rationalization inherent to such an approach uses words such as "duty," "efficiency," "rules," or "policy."

With the involvement of more stakeholders in the decision making process, more issues are emerging which pressure principals to work collaboratively with their various publics (Alberta School Boards Association, 1993). For example, violence prevention strategies encourage principals to seek meaningful input from parents and students when designing discipline policies that are based on school board frameworks. It is not clear whether, in the school violence issue, principals are being pressured to compromise among competing interests that are both inside (e.g., students) as well as outside (e.g., media) the educational system. Presumably, these multiple pressures demand a delicate balance of integrating what each involved party considers to be in the "best interests of children."

Limitations of the Framework

There were many directions that could have been be further explored within the theoretical framework developed from the literature review (e.g., the communication of decisions; the process for initiating, monitoring and evaluating violence reduction strategies; motivational strategies). Although these are elements which warrant further study, this research was confined to: (a) the ways in which principals framed the problem of school violence, (b) how they perceived their role in addressing such issues, and (c) what variables influenced the decision-making process which they chose to follow.

Summary

Regardless of the terminology used, educators (e.g., Alberta Education, 1993a; British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994; Ontario Ministry of Education and

Training, 1994), researchers (e.g., Ryan, Mathews, & Banner, 1993; Smith, et al., 1995) and the public (e.g., Environics, cited in MacDougall, 1993) agreed that youth behavior was an on-going concern. What was not as clear was whether this issue had always existed (e.g., delinquency, lack of discipline) and was simply recast as "violence," or a new phenomenon was emerging.

Although the public is quick to attribute blame to parenting, or lenient laws, the important role that schools play in influencing the lives of young people can not be dismissed. For this reason, a number of educators (e.g., Auty, 1993), researchers (e.g., Mathews, 1994) and police (e.g., Newark & Kessel, 1994) believe that schools must develop and expand policies and programs to deal with school violence. What is not as readily agreed upon is how to achieve safe and caring schools (e.g., increased or decreased discipline and sanctions).

Although the list of available resources for schools is expanding rapidly, research outlining the effectiveness of such programs and initiatives is largely absent in the literature. In some instances, policies are being developed by schools boards on the basis of political pressure, a desire to be viewed as being proactive, or as a result of a critical violent incident.

Principals play a major role in influencing the direction that schools take in violence prevention. Their knowledge and understanding of how to critically evaluate available resources and implement strategies, as well as their notions of what is in the best interests of the students they oversee, greatly influences the effectiveness of those measures they choose to adopt in their schools.

Although there is growing interest in compiling information as to which programs, practices, and initiatives principals are choosing, there is less knowledge about the influences on their decisions. What is found in the literature, with regard to the implementation of violence related practices, is devoid of the role that politics, values, beliefs, and professional experience play, if any, in guiding those decisions. Rather, evaluative processes have focused more on pre- and post-program testing of students' attitudes and behaviors, or evaluations of school climate changes resulting from the introduction of violence prevention strategies.

Following the review of the literature, it became clear that establishing linkages between principals' leadership and directions taken to address school violence would prove useful to both researchers and practitioners. Using the tentative theoretical framework proposed in this chapter, data were gathered to explore how and why principals responded to the issue of violence in their schools.

Chapter 3

ACT III

Scene I: Friday Afternoon, in the Principal's office of Supleh High School

"This has got to be the most tedious stack of paper I have ever poured over," Eneri decided. "Will it never end?" Just then, the roar of an engine, and then another. "Damn it," those kids are at it again. What's with them?" Cam thought. "I heard, and I'm onto it" he yelled from across the corridor. "Leave it to me. Don't you worry about anything else other than that budget, okay?" "Budget, I think not! I'm off to the gym to see the volleyball game," Eneri thought to herself.

Scene II: Same afternoon in the Assistant Principal's Office

Cam decided that he would take matters into his own hands. He rechecked his schedule, confirming that he had no class to teach until next period. With pen and paper in hand, Cam walked out from his office, heading for the school parking lot. "Sir, could I see you for a minute? It's pretty urgent, actually," a tall, blonde young man asked Cam. "I am in the middle of something quite important, but if you ask the secretary to book you in for say, tomorrow, I can talk to you then," Cam replied. "And your name is?" Cam asked. "My name is Don. And, just forget it. Tomorrow won't help." "As you wish," Cam continued to walk down the hall. The staff parking area was located on the northern side of the building and student parking started at the side of the football field. Although the students' area seemed more than ample, there were always complaints of insufficient parking spots. Cam looked at the haphazardly arranged cars. "No wonder there isn't enough space. These bloody kids can't park straight," Cam thought to himself. Cam walked row by row stopping at every red, black, and grey car. "I know there were no trucks or vans involved, but it's still better to list more cars than less. Afterall, they drove by so quickly., A Nissan, Mazda, Neon, Saturn, or Cavalier - they all look the same from a distance," Cam mused. By the time he was finished, Cam had copied over 25 license plate numbers and car descriptions. Walking back into his office, he found the phone number of the local police detachment. As the bell sounded, Cam jotted the number down, gathered his books and left to teach his 2:10 p.m. Social 20 class.

RESEARCH METHOD

A review of predominately North American literature revealed that there is little common understanding regarding what constitutes school violence, or the thought processes involved in deciding how to effectively prevent or respond to it. This gap in the literature offered an excellent opportunity to examine the subject further, as well as to develop substantive theory, through the use of grounded theory techniques. In this chapter, matters are discussed that relate to: (a) the theoretical orientation of the research methodology; (b) the research method, including data collection, research instruments; (c) data analysis; and (d) trustworthiness.

Research Orientation

A qualitative method, guided by an interpretivist research orientation, was selected as the most appropriate approach to conduct this study. Assumptions of knowledge posited by naturalistic inquiry as well as a research orientation of symbolic interactionism framed the study's methodological approach.

Symbolic Interactionism

Naturalistic inquiry assumes that only from knowledge of the influences and the processes by which people confer meaning on objects, events, people and situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.33) can one understand human behavior. Originating in the field of sociology, symbolic interactionism represents a school of thought which "sees meaning as social products formed through activities of people interacting" (Blumer,

1969, p.5). Within this orientation, it is assumed that the researcher will strive to better understand how social realities are constructed, sustained, or changed (Hassard, 1981).

Interpretivism

Symbolic interactionism suggests a way of conceptualizing sources of knowledge and influences on human behavior. Interpretivism is a research orientation, which holds theoretical assumptions, outlined as follows. The grounds of knowledge (i.e., epistemology) are considered to extend beyond that which is observable and measurable. This is a subjectivist orientation which focuses on human interaction as the source of data. Interpretivism guides researchers to study unobservable symbols of behavior such as perceptions, values, or motivation. Relationships are key sources for understanding and it is through direct communication and observation of participants that the researcher comes to understand the meaning of the language used to describe interpretations of people, place and circumstance (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Interpretivism was well suited to guide the study of principals' responses to school violence for several reasons. Firstly, the research sought to better understand how individual participants conceptualize the term of "school violence." This was especially valuable, given the inconsistent usage of the term found in the literature (e.g., Alberta Education, 1993a; British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994).

The interpretivist orientation recognizes that the relationship between the researcher and informants influences the collection and analysis of the data. Although it is an approach with no apologies offered for its value-laden and contextual processes, it

does nonetheless require that researchers demonstrate the steps taken to ensure credibility. As a topic, school violence elicits responses that are often value-laden and very much related to one's views on many ancillary issues (e.g., role of the school, violence in society, the style of discipline). For this reason, the interview process was semi-structured so as to allow respondents to diverge to those areas of the topic that they deemed of most importance.

Grounded Theory

In its narrowest definition, grounded theory is an approach introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), that seeks to formulate theory through a process of integrating concepts and relationships which are "grounded" in the data themselves. Grounded theory methodology does not attempt to prove or disprove a previously held hypothesis, but rather sees theory as emerging from a thorough reinterpretation and understanding of the patterns that exist in the way persons construct experiences. Inquiry is focused so as to better understand the subjective construction of reality - an understanding enriched by exploring the meaning, values, and perspectives that subjects attach to their experiences.

Glaser and Strauss believed that an understanding of social phenomena came from gathering data that could provide multiple perspectives. This phenomenological approach began with the assumption, as Blumer (1969) suggested, that human experiences are a product of one's own understandings and interpretations of reality. The difficulty in adopting this approach to educational research, in particular, lies in the ability to apply what was learned from one subject in one particular setting to multiple settings. At issue is how well can interpretive studies be applied to schooling in more general terms? This

"generalizability" of research findings was a major concern expressed by Positivist researchers. Grounded theory methodology, in part, addressed the generalizability of findings in qualitative research by its focus on "the systemic generat[ion] of theory from the data itself [sic] (Glaser, 1978, p.2).

Grounded theory acknowledges that a researcher will draw on personal knowledge and experience to analyze, interpret, and propose meaning to data. However, in order to reach a point where a theoretical premise can be suggested, the constructs must be validated by the data and organized as emergent themes. The methodology can be viewed as a compromise between the deductive, theory building approach within Positivist inquiry and the perceived lack of theory generation given the approaches of the Chicago School of Sociology. Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed a framework for achieving a balance that could construct theory that was not based on apriori hypotheses designed to correlate variables which determine human behavior.

Procedures

This study utilized semi-structured interviews with 12 principals in one large, urban, public school system located in Western Canada. The interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed. The requirements for research with human subjects, as prescribed by policy at the University of Alberta were met, guaranteeing participants: (a) anonymity, (b) confidentiality, and (c) the option to opt out of the study at any time. Interviews ranged from 1.5 to 2 hours in duration and took place in the principals' offices.

During the interviews, five principals volunteered to provide school or personal documents which they felt would be of benefit to the study. These documents are used as

a secondary data source and analyzed. Inconsistencies and similarities between the individual interviews and the school documents were identified and addressed in Chapter 4. Open coding provided a platform for the emergence of themes and patterns that were later integrated into the substantive theory.

The Respondent Group

Although the number of principals was not predetermined in advance of the final research design, it was influenced by the process used to select participants for the study. Twelve principals from a large urban district in Western Canada were purposefully selected on the basis of their success in effectively reducing violence in their schools. A senior administrative member of the district's central office staff made this assessment on my behalf. This individual was known professionally to me and regarded by colleagues as being very well informed in the area of school violence. This senior administrator was requested to compile a confidential list of names of junior high school principals who were regarded as exemplary in the area of creating safe and caring schools.

The names of 12 potential participants were provided in writing to me by the senior administrator in the district's central office. Of that list, all 12 were contacted by telephone and all 12 subsequently agreed to participate in the study. Interviews were scheduled at the schools during mutually convenient times.

At two of the interview sessions, the principals invited their assistant principals to join in the dialogue believing that their participation would add insights to the conversation. After ethical considerations were discussed, the interviews continued. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested using subsequent interviews for the purpose of

clarifying or testing out new theories that have emerged from those transcripts that have already been analyzed. This did occur and a number of principals were encouraged to offer their thoughts on the relevance of the aspect of building relationships: a theme that was prevalent in earlier interviews. A purposive sample, as well as efforts made to test the soundness of emerging theories partially compensated for the lack of theoretical sampling.

Data Collection Procedures

Administrators were given the choice of two interviews (one hour each in duration) or one interview of two hours. All of the participants opted for one longer interview. The participants were reminded that an individual in the district's central administration had recommended them for the study. Trust is a quality that is normally earned with time. I believe that the knowledge that their names had been provided by a common acquaintance, together with my reputation for involvement with the Alberta Teachers' Association's *Safe and Caring Schools Initiative*, established a rapport which influenced the quality of the interviews. I was impressed by the candor and forthrightness of the dialogue which I believe would not have existed had I been viewed by the participants as an unknown doctoral student.

The Interview

Interviews were conducted during April and May of 1997. The interview included a combination of closed and open form questions corresponding to each of the research subquestions. Participants were requested to provide data relating to prior administrative

experience and examples of formal involvement in violence prevention programs. Open-ended questions focused primarily on: (a) what constituted school violence, (b) what factors influence initiatives and strategies designed to respond to violent behaviors in their schools, and (c) what processes were used in their decisions to address school violence.

Secondary Data Source

Interviews and notes, taken prior to and subsequent to the interviews, were the primary source of data from which theory developed in my dissertation. Analysis of school documents provided by five of the participants were used as a secondary data source. Where appropriate, themes from both sources were compared and integrated.

Pilot Study

A pilot study of the interview questions was conducted with two principals who were not in the same school district as those in the main study. This pilot study was undertaken to attain the following goals, namely to: (a) uncover unforeseen aspects of the data collection methods; (b) explore the nature and level of interest from principals in the study of the research questions; (c) gain insights about the strengths and weaknesses related to the interview design; and (d) determine if the findings would lend themselves to analysis.

All four goals were accomplished, with commentary as follows. The principals remarked that the time allotted for the interviews was ideal at 90 minutes; furthermore, they would not have preferred two sessions of a shorter duration. Participants found the

questions to be thorough, reflective, and the method of data collection appropriate. Each of the individuals felt that the interview was thought-provoking, timely, and expressed interest in obtaining a final summary report of the study.

In the first of the pilot interviews, the question regarding the meaning of school violence within the context of the specific school was asked part way through the interview. Several questions of clarification had to be asked until such time as an interpretation of violence was clarified. In order to address this confusion, participants in subsequent interviews were asked to define school violence at the onset. In terms of the analysis of the data, the interview in which I neglected to ask for the respondent's definition of violence at the beginning was difficult to interpret. An early and explicit understanding of what constituted school violence for principals was therefore determined to be a requisite for future interviews.

Procedures for Data Analysis

Analysis of data was based on Glaser and Strauss' (1967) integrative steps which included memoing, a constant comparative method of data analysis, and open coding. A coding framework was developed to facilitate the organization of transcript data, loosely based on the work of Bolman and Deal (1992).

Memoing

Deriving hypotheses from a thorough examination of the data requires constant validation of emergent theories from the data. In order to resist the temptation to apply deductive reasoning, Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that the researcher take the time

to write thoughts down about the data as they arise. These "theories" may be shaped and reshaped as the data become more refined and sorted. This integration of data and theory would be of particular importance in those circumstances when a researcher may wish to pay special attention to guarding against undue bias arising from previous work in the area. Memoing can also capture personal reflections and assumptions which if written and later reread, can remind the researcher of the influence of biases.

As an analytical tool, the use of memoing provides a method of organizing ideas and relationships amongst and between data. As Strauss (1987) stated, this becomes especially important when the volume of data increases and theoretical concepts take shape. This memoing can take the form of textual or graphic representation. The latter is known as integrative diagramming (Strauss, 1987) and was used extensively in the formulation of concepts and theories in my study. Prior to the interviews, I made notes in a journal, describing my thoughts and impressions of the school (e.g., the greeting upon arrival, the behavior of students, the posters, cleanliness). Likewise, I made notes after the interview, offering as many insights as to what had transpired. These field notes were both descriptive and reflective - reconstructing as much as possible, conversations that took place without the benefit of being audio-taped. The transcribed interviews were read several times with the intent of finding key issues or themes in the discussion. Those which were recurring became categories of focus and were compared to the theoretical framework originally developed from the literature.

Constant Comparative Method

Glaser and Strauss (1967) described a way of analyzing data known as the constant comparative method. The four steps they suggested were " (1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory" (p. 105).

As theory evolved from the constant integration of concepts, I was forced to revisit the literature. Questions were raised and hypotheses were further expanded or discarded. As this analysis continued, tentative hypotheses emerged, which remained open to question and further refinement (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Open Coding

According to Strauss (1987), analysis of data requires "all three aspect of inquiry (induction, deduction, and verification)" (p.12). In contrast to sorting data according to predetermined categories or themes, open coding requires an open-minded approach, without artificially imposed hypotheses that are to be confirmed or disproved through data analysis. Rather, concepts and themes emerge from the data as they are read and reread. This process operates in unison with an analysis of data, and loops continuously from analysis, to coding, to more analysis. Further in time, the method results in a "higher level, overriding and integrating conceptualization . . ." (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 36).

Strauss (1987, p. 30) suggested four guidelines to consider when analyzing data through such open coding: to examine the data with a consistent set of questions, to analyze the data in minute detail, to take time to reflect during coding, to write a theoretical note or observation, and to not assume the relevance of traditional variables

(e.g., gender, age, education) unless the data indicate that they are relevant. It is the third step, which Strauss refers to as "memo writing" that has special relevance to the formulation of grounded theory. Too often, he believed, researchers would fall upon a "hunch" or hypothesis on the nature of the relationship between data or postulate theories which, if left unwritten, were often forgotten or dismissed.

Based on Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method of analysis, rereading the transcripts often resulted in further reduction of data into more specific units of analysis. Coding evolved from "themes" into: (a) concepts (e.g., misbehavior-disruption-disobedience-breaking rules); (b) characters (e.g., references to staff, parents, students); and (c) items (e.g., policies, rules, contracts).

As a first step towards an organization of the data, a table was organized containing themes representative of the responses of each participant to the interview questions. This proved to be a useful way of summarizing both individual as well as aggregate data categories, which then evolved into a tentative substantive theory. Although substantive theory was considered an endpoint of the data analysis, knowledge of leadership theory rendered an opportunity to consider theoretical, as well as substantive codes.

As the coding continued, the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2 became inadequate. Largely as a result of continual memoing and diagramming reflective of personal theorizing, themes and relationships among these themes were expanded and refined. I revisited the individual interview transcripts twice so that in the process of bringing together common themes, I could also maintain the unique insights of each

principal. At the second reading, pseudonyms were removed from the transcripts so as to address any undue influence of associating individuals with their interviews.

In their analysis of leadership effectiveness, Bolman and Deal's (1992) criteria for coding concepts, proved to be relevant in organizing the coding frames used in this study. Comparing the issues deemed most important by school administrators in Florida and Singapore on the issues they deemed most important, Bolman and Deal conceptualized four major frames: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. In many ways, their frames were compatible with both the process of decision making and as the impetus for decisions related to the prevention of school violence. Although Bolman and Deal's work was influential in the analysis of my own data, it was modified to incorporate new concepts and eliminate those that were not suitable.

After re-reading the first three interview transcripts, the dominance of two themes became apparent: personal values and the importance of relationships. These concepts were thus introduced as coding frames to be used in subsequent transcript analysis. Table 1 outlines the revised frames which highlight, in italics, the text drawn from Bolman and Deal's work.

Trustworthiness

Validity and reliability are concerns regardless of the research methodology (Merriam, 1988, p. 65). Naturalistic inquiry, argued Guba and Lincoln (1982), required a re-conceptualization of these "rationalist" terms. They proposed a different standard by which to judge the trustworthiness of research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (p.120). In concert with their perspective, the standards of credibility,

Table 1. Coding Frames used in Transcript Analysis

Frame	Related Concepts
Structural	*policies, role definition, planning,evaluation*
Relationships	communications, involvement of others in decision-making, needs definition,
Personal Values	philosophy of discipline, role of schools, needs of teenagers, role of principal
Political	advocacy, *networking, negotiation*, public relations
Symbolic	*rituals, working of vision building*, symbolic leadership, ceremonies

confirmability, transferability, and dependability used to collect, analyze and interpret data are addressed in the following paragraphs.

Credibility

In 1982, Owens wrote an article which addressed the dilemma faced by qualitative researchers in demonstrating "methodological rigor" (p.1). He suggested a set of questions that in answering, would guide the researcher in addressing the credibility of the study, namely: (a) How does one know what is really happening, in view of the complexity and dynamics of human behavior? (b) How can one be assured that biases have not been unduly influential? and (c) To what degree can the findings be accepted as "credible interpretations of reality?" (p. 14).

I sought credibility in this study in several ways. All efforts were made to seek clarification from participants as to the meaning of their responses. At various junction points in the interviews, a verbal summation was provided which principals were asked to confirm or expand upon if necessary. On numerous occasions, the responses were: "that's exactly what I meant," "you nailed it," "right on." In those other cases where principals were less supportive, comments were still positive: "I suppose that's right," "I could have said that." In such instances, efforts were made to provide opportunities for participants to clarify and expand upon their responses.

All twelve participants were invited to comment on the theoretical model developed: *A leadership theory for addressing violence in schools* (see Chapter 5). In the Fall of 1997, each principal was contacted by telephone and provided with a brief summary of the study. They were invited to comment in writing or verbally, to a facsimiled diagram representing the emergent theory of my study. In particular, principals were asked whether the conclusions reached were applicable to them, or if there were areas that they felt were not sufficiently addressed. Each of the ten available principals welcomed the opportunity to accommodate my request and faxed their comments back to me within two days. Feedback from these informal "member checks" (Owens, 1982, p. 15) as well as informal discussion with colleagues as to whether the findings "made sense," were considered in the "fine tuning" of the final model. Two of the principals were unavailable and the remaining ten offered the following feedback:

1. No changes necessary, excellent as is (n=8).
2. Excellent but change the wording of several points to clarify meaning (n=2).

In the two interviews in which the principals invited their vice-principals to join in the dialogue it is difficult to state unequivocally that these principals' responses would not have changed had their vice-principals been present. The importance they placed on having "my partner" participate in the interview was itself important and the significance of staff relationships are addressed in Chapter 4 *(Facilitating a Process).*

Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggested *triangulation* as an effective means of continually testing for credibility. Denzin (1978) outlined triangulation as cross-checking data and interpretation with different data sources, theories, perspectives and methods. This was addressed by: (a) revisiting the literature, (b) reviewing notes taken from pre- and post-interview observations, and (c) reviewing school documents provided by some of the participants.

To maintain credibility in this study, after the primary analysis of data, two additional copies of each interview transcript were produced and assigned a different pseudonym each time. Allowing for a sufficient lapse of time and memory (e.g., two weeks), I reread the transcripts and took notes. In so doing, I was able to check for missed data.

Confirmability

The effort one makes to confront personal assumptions, biases, and prejudices about the research topic or its participants addresses what Guba and Lincoln (1982) termed *confirmability*. Triangulation, as discussed in the previous section touched on this issue, as did efforts to review the transcripts several times, in order to recognize the importance of respondents' silences, redirection, or emphases in the interviews.

The reality of naturalistic inquiry is that it is value-laden. It is a rare researcher who enters the field without assumptions or firmly held beliefs that in some way relate to the topic of study. Glaser (1978) termed this "theoretical sensitivity" and considered it to be the personal experiences and professional knowledge that the researcher brings to the inquiry (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

I hold a set of perceptions which have shaped the way I conceptualize school violence and judge the effectiveness of strategies that deal with it. To summarize, my assumptions are: (a) the activities which take place during school hours provide the most powerful influence in the lives of junior high school students; (b) school policies and practices can serve to either nurture or inhibit a culture of caring and safety; (c) school climate, pupil discipline ideology, instructional strategies, and staff role modeling contribute to the level of school violence; (d) strategies which principals choose to address violence in their schools are influenced by their personal beliefs and assumptions regarding discipline and youth more than any empirical evidence of the effectiveness of such strategies; and (e) the determinate of the quality of school life is dependent on what principals do or do not do.

These assumptions have been influenced by: (a) experiences as a parent, (b) work in schools as a Practicum advisor for student teachers, (c) three years as a school trustee, (d) insights gained as a member of Provincial Safe and Caring schools committees, (e) the personal values that I bring to my assumptions regarding what constitutes a safe school, and (f) research that I have been involved with over the past four years in the area of school violence. I have witnessed the powerful influence of student teachers who can

create a classroom environment that is both disruptive and "violent," or engage students in such a way as to promote a spirit of cooperation and respect. As a trustee and parent, I witnessed the rapid transformation of a school based on a change in principalship. Research involving junior high school students has highlighted the connections that students make between the level of violent and disruptive behaviors, and school policies and staff behavior. Membership on *Safe and Caring Schools* committees has reinforced my belief that principals are largely unaware of research in the area of school violence and, in particular, program, and policy evaluation.

Attention to personal biases and their possible influence were integral to the confirmability of this study. For this reason, several strategies were utilized: (a) interview questions were pre-tested in the pilot study so as to solicit suggestions from participants; (b) I conducted a review of the relevant literature as well participated in conversations with fellow graduate students and principals to validate the study's clarity of purpose, method, and research instruments used; and (c) all of the participants were asked to comment on the preliminary data analysis to ensure that their interviews were accurately interpreted. At the onset of the study, principals declined the invitation to verify the accuracy of their transcripts, due to constraints of time.

Transferability

Strauss and Corbin (1994) cautioned that substantive theory is rooted in knowledge that is "closely linked with time and place" (p. 276). As much as possible, the findings have utilized thick description (Geertz, 1975) providing readers with a context of "time and place."

A purposive sample maximized the likelihood that linkages could be established between the interviews. This facilitated the formulation of substantive theory grounded within the data themselves. The data were collected at a time when provincial school violence initiatives and public concerns over youth violence were high. In the months prior to the interviews, the sample of principals had been administered numerous surveys by the teachers' associations, and been provided with lists of violence prevention resources for use in schools.

It is up to the reader to determine whether the emergent substantive theory which touched upon concepts such as leadership, school climate, and school effectiveness has relevance in other areas of principal decision making.

Dependability

In qualitative research, dependability is linked to the likelihood that the study could yield similar results under the same circumstances. The province's unique political environment, combined with my extensive involvement in the area of school violence might make one question whether duplication could indeed be possible. However, the numerous parallels between substantive theory developed in this study and that found in prior research suggests that the argument for dependability is strong. Notes, memos, and coding frames written throughout the various stages of the research also provide readers with sufficient means by which to repeat a similarly designed study.

Shipman (1981) has cautioned that the use of one method of data collection can lead to "a one-dimensional snapshot of a very wide and deep social scene" (p. 147). Although multiple methods of data collection are often used to increase confidence in the

reliability of the data collected, this study was limited to data collected through interviews and analysis of those documents (e.g., school handbooks, behavior policies) which principals volunteered to provide.

Ethical Considerations

In January of 1997, a *Research Ethics Review Application* was submitted to, and approved by, the Department of Educational Policy Studies outlining the following: (a) the objectives and procedure of the study, (b) the nature of involvement of human participants, (c) a procedure to address anonymity and confidentiality issues.

Two months before the study began, I had the opportunity of spending some time with a senior administrator of the district from which the participants were selected to discuss a joint project on safe and caring schools. During this meeting, I requested that he develop for me a list of exemplary junior high school principals who were effective in addressing school violence. At this time, I made it clear that this list was to be used, in confidence, for the purpose of my doctoral research. A list of 12 names was e-mailed to me within several days of this request.

Several weeks prior to data collection, principals were contacted by telephone and asked if they would be willing to participate in my research study. They were informed of the source who had provided me with their names, the nature of the study, the time requirements for participation, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

On-site interviews were arranged, as per the schedule of the principals. On the day of the interviews, two copies of the consent letter was provided explaining the nature of the research, its potential value to education, data collection, and issues of confidentiality,

and anonymity. Participants were assured that the final research report would not identify any person, school, or school jurisdiction by name. Principals were asked to sign both copies of the letter: one copy for their own files, and one to be retained by me. In the two cases where assistant principals were invited into the interviews, their consent was also obtained.

All audio-taped interviews were stored in a secure place, inaccessible to anyone but me. Contact was made with an individual at the University of Calgary who was highly recommended as a reliable and trustworthy transcriber. The issue of confidentiality was discussed and all tapes were transcribed and saved onto diskettes which were then delivered in person.

Pseudonyms were used in this document to protect the identities of the study's participants.

Summary

The principles of grounded theory were used to guide the research method used in this study. It was a process involving both deductive and inductive interpretation of data using a theoretical umbrella of symbolic interactionism.

Concurrently collecting and analyzing data provided opportunities to test the plausibility of emergent theories in interviews with subsequent participants. Analysis of school documents made available by principals, provided a secondary source of data.

Coding of data used the constant comparative method of analysis, complemented by memo writing and diagramming. Trustworthiness was addressed using Guba and Lincoln's model of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

A theoretical framework, guided by personal assumptions and a review of the literature, guided the preliminary analysis of data. Memoing, diagrams, and constant comparisons of data formed the basis of an emergent theory which described how exemplary junior high school principals make decisions regarding violence in their schools.

Chapter 4

ACT IV

Scene I: In the parking lot of Supleh High school, Friday Afternoon

The scene that greeted Cam when he stepped outside made his nerves taut. Kids, kids, and more tough looking kids. "Where did they all come from?" he thought to himself. "Surely they didn't all belong here." It was so difficult to make out the conversations. What he did hear were mostly cusses. As he approached the crowd, he saw one young man surrounded by a group of maybe 10 or 15. "I wonder whose class they're in," Cam thought.

"Bring it on, buddy" shouted one young punk. The crowd edged closer. Standing tall, blonde, and composed, he spoke with a quiet strength: "I have no argument with you, I will not fight." "Good for him, he must be one of our kids for sure," Cam thought. "Okay folks, time to be moving on, let's just everybody go about their business and go home or go into class, or whatever (nobody moved). "You want to play macho, then do it somewhere else, or I'll be calling the cops." The mere mention of the word "cops" would scatter these punks faster than anything. His thoughts turned to last month's professional development day: violence prevention. "Finally, a workshop that's been useful, " Cam thought to himself. Eneri would have sweet talked, asked politely, concentrated on bringing peace: all that "psycho-babble, touchy-feely stuff " that administrators like her force down our throats. Cam smiled to himself, thinking how fortunate Eneri was to have an administrator who could deal with these kinds of tough situations.

"Screw you buddy," yelled back one of the crowd . Okay, they want to play tough, thought Cam, I can play tough too. "You, you, you and you (pointing randomly at individuals in the crowd) are now officially suspended next week. Don't bother coming in here on Monday! This school does not tolerate fighting of any kind, let alone insubordination or respect to authority!" "Ya right buddy, whatever. We don't even go to this craphole anyways" retorted another of the youth. Cam stood in silence, reflecting for a moment on his options. "I thought those kids looked unfamiliar. Although, I could have sworn I recognized that kid from the Science lab. Maybe he went here last year? Likely got booted out. I'd love to pop that bastard in his insolent mouth. . .loser!" Cam thought to himself.

FINDINGS

This study sought to explore and to better understand what influenced the decisions junior high school principals made in responding to, or preventing violence in their schools. An analysis of the interviews of 12 purposefully selected principals was first undertaken to address the subproblems built into the tentative model discussed in Chapter 2: (a) identifying the problem, (b) influences on decisions, (c) making decisions, and (d) perceived outcomes of those decisions. During the course of data analysis, new elements emerged that either did not "fit," or expanded upon the relationships between suggested components of the first model.

In this chapter, the findings are thus presented in accordance with the emergent theory. The relevant subproblems that the findings addressed are identified in accordance to portions of the model described in the following sections: (a) describing school violence, (b) influences on decisions, (c) decision-making processes, (d) outcomes of decisions, (e) emergent findings and themes. This chapter begins with an overview of what the schools and their principals were like, and a rationale for why they are described as exemplary principals. The chapter concludes with the presentation of the emergent model as supported by the findings.

Demographics

Twelve junior high school principals were interviewed from a large, urban, Western Canadian public school district. All schools but one, were configured as grades

7-9 schools. In order to provide a context for the data collected in this study, a brief description of the city, school district, schools, and principals is provided.

The City

Kalmon (pseudonym) is a Western Canadian city of just under 800,000 people. In the past three years, it has experienced a rapid population growth as a result of its growing economy. Until recently, the ethnic population was quite low, and newcomers to the city primarily arrived from other parts of Canada and the United States.

Kalmon is a cosmopolitan city which sees itself as the business and financial centre of Western Canada. It considers itself to be highly entrepreneurial and boasts one of the most educated workforces in the country. There is a strong conservative ideology in the city, which is also the hometown of many of the current provincial government's elected politicians.

The School District

The *Kalmon Public School District* is one of the largest in Canada. It is one of the largest employers in the city, and serves almost 100,000 students throughout its over 200 schools. An elected board of trustees oversees the general policies of the district which are administered by a senior staff that has been recently "downsized." Funding is provided by the provincial government and each school receives a budget based on its student enrollment. Families are free to send their children to any schools of their choice providing that there is capacity at the school after children within the local boundaries are accommodated. Professional development dollars, allocated to each school, can be used

as each school sees fit. However, the principal remains the final authority for the school budget.

The Schools

The principals of twelve schools, representing each of the four quadrants of the city, were interviewed. The junior high pupil enrollment for these schools ranged from a low of 300 in Jeri's school to a high of 700 in Bobbie's school. Physically, the schools were characterized in one of two ways: (a) modern decor, well-lit, bright, and (b) poorly lit, visible signs of aging, unappealing decor. The schools ranged in age, the oldest having been built in the 1950s and the most modern, completed in the mid-1980s. On average, the schools were 25 years old.

The schools represented a mix of socio-economic strata: four drew their student population from largely middle to upper income, white neighbourhoods; five were known as "high needs schools" with multi-ethnic, low-income neighbourhoods; and the remainder were middle-income, multi-ethnic schools. The schools identified as "high needs" were located in areas of the city with low-income housing, higher than the average crime rates, a transient population - many of whom were on social assistance.

The Participants

Twelve principals were interviewed, representing both genders, and an administrative experience of between nine months and 15 years. Each principal, ranging in age from early forties to late fifties, had been assigned to his or her current school for six or fewer years. Approximately one third of the principals had completed some post-

graduate work, and nine of the 12 had held administrative positions in "high needs" schools.

Notions of Exemplary

The 12 principals who participated in this study were selected upon the recommendation of a senior administrator in the district, who was asked to identify the names of junior high school principals who were regarded as exemplary in the area of creating safe and caring schools. When asked on what basis this judgment was made, the senior administrator indicated that all of the principals were: (a) clear about their roles in providing a safe and caring school, (b) were knowledgeable about sound educational practices, and (c) had the skills needed to create a positive school climate. In addition, each participant was described as entrepreneurial, creative and a team player.

Identifying the "Problem"

The findings related to the first subproblem identified in the research question will be the focus of the following section. Specifically, the subproblem asked:

How do principals describe the issue of school violence as they frame it in their schools?

Describing School Violence

In order to mitigate the effects of my assumptions regarding the meaning of school violence, principals were asked, at the beginning of the interviews, what the term "school violence" meant within the context of their own schools. Given the multiple perspectives examined in the literature review, this was deemed an essential starting point.

When asked to define school violence, principals did not have an immediate answer. Fran believed that I should call my study, "a study of school climate," not of "school violence." From his perspective, using the expression "school violence," assumed that violence existed and that the only question was: how to cope with violence? It was, as Fran termed it, "reactive posturing."

Upon further probing, principals positioned violence along various points on a continuum, ranging from physically to emotionally harmful behaviors. Cory captured the essence of why violence was difficult to define, stating that too many people tried to cast the problem in narrow terms by simply listing together behaviors that were violent, disruptive, or simply inappropriate. Although varying forms of verbal, emotional or physical harassment could "fit" into any one of these categories (e.g., violence, delinquency, disruption), principals felt that a focus on definitions oversimplified a complex problem. Respondents thus found it more relevant to describe what they were seeking in a school environment rather than list those behaviors they wished to reduce:

> So the brochures and all that stuff [about violence] may be nice, but most of us couldn't care less . . . I think we have a responsibility for forming positive relationships with kids, I think that feeds them. (Andi)

When questioned whether their conceptualization of violence was a shared or personal definition, opinions were mixed: some stated that it was a personal definition, others thought that some staff and parents shared the interpretation, and all recognized that most students would not define violence in this way due to the difficulty in recognizing harassment and intimidation as "violent." Even when efforts had been made

to reach consensus through staff, parent or student discussions, most principals felt that, in practice, variations continued to exist in the interpretation of violence amongst the school community.

Reaching agreement on the definition of violence did not seem to rank as a high priority. This was due to a belief that violence was not an issue at the school level. That is not to say that principals felt that it did not exist in their schools. Rather, they believed that violence was symptomatic of other problems that required more of their attention. As Joele argued, although the resulting behavior may be violent, the problem in and of itself was not violence:

> We have an anger management course. Well, what a great place to put a kid that's been in fights a lot because he loses his temper but it doesn't mean there's a violence issue. It's that he loses his temper. So, we put him in an anger management course and give him some skills to cope with . . . .

Principals suggested that the difficulty in defining violence was a consequence of two factors: (a) the fluidity of the term, resulting from the range of tolerance found in the school community, and (b) a belief that violence was a symptom of other problems. For example, Bobbie noted that parents often "normalized" behaviors that school staff considered inappropriate:

> They [parents] do label some of this stuff political correctness. They think the sexual teasing is part of normal growing up and that they did it, it's okay. They really don't believe that it hurts kids. . . they do label some of this stuf political correctness.

Inconsistencies in describing violence often arose amongst the staff. Pat felt that this was a factor of differing zones of tolerance for behaviors. For example, some staff viewed an incident of misbehavior as sufficient grounds for removing a student; the same incident that Pat considered to be a case of student misconduct.

Pat suggested that a consistent, all encompassing definition of violence was less important than dealing with issues of providing a safe and caring school. She stated that violence was not what dominated discussions or decision-making at the school level. Rather, her staff focused on developing a sense of family and a spirit of working together.

In addition to focusing on the root causes of violence, principals such as Jeri, reflected on the effects of violence; the effect that violent incidents had on their lives and on their schools. These stories ranged from the death of a student, dealing with a verbally abusive staff member, or removing a student from an abusive home. Although the example did not relate to school-based violence, Jeri offered a moving account of the impact that violence can often have on schools:

> . . . the next day I was late getting in and she [the student] was sitting on the couch out in the office and she was just beaten up terribly, just really beaten . . . a couple of the other staff snuck over to the house, snuck her stuff out, we moved her into a shelter . . . at the end of the day [driving home] I hit the stop light and just started to cry. Some days it just tumbles out and then once it starts, it's really hard because your heart aches for some of these kids. Your heart hurts.

Stories conjured up past feelings of emotion that had lasting effects on the principals. Perhaps that is why they found it easier to describe what constituted a violent

act by the effect it had on the victim, rather than by the intent of the perpetrator (e.g., bullying, harassment). Principals admitted that they were often not aware of all incidents that took place on school property. Through efforts to maintain good relations with students and parents, and observing changes in student behavior, it was hoped that all victims could eventually be identified:

> Half the time you don't know about it [violence]. You kind of just meet the victim later on or you hear about it from a parent that their child doesn't want to come to school, that they're crying every night. (Jeri)

Refusing to limit their conceptualization of violence to a list of behaviors, allowed principals to be more cognizant of the underlying causes that contributed to the violence. Often, these problems could be directly related to the operation of the school. Kale, for example, believed that there was little cause for violence from students if they felt cared for, liked, connected, and wanted to be at school. Unfortunately, the structure of junior high schools often constrained the ability of principals to build this sense of belonging. Reflecting on the advantage of the seven years students typically spent in elementary schools, Cory noted :

> It's hard. In a junior high school you have one third of your population moving. You're always foreclosing your business and at the end of the year, you're re-establishing your business in a new year with a third of your population changing over.

Compounding this problem was the fact that most junior high schools acted as feeder schools, serving a number of adjacent communities. Three years to build a

cohesive school culture with students enrolling from a number of elementary schools, often with different school cultures, was cited as a serious impediment. In junior high schools (e.g., configured as grades 7 to 9), the lack of time to (a) build caring relationships, (b) promote a sense of belonging by students, (c) influence the behavior of students, and (d) promote a unique school culture despite the diversity of students, had the potential to create problems manifested by "violent" behaviors (e.g., vandalism, harassment).

Principals believed that part of the challenge in maintaining a safe school came from the multiple perspectives of staff, parent, and community regarding the sources of violence, as well as the most effective means to deal with it. A lack of consensus on what behaviors were "violent" as well as what role the principal should play in dealing with such issues formed part of the problem:

> I just got chewed on by a parent. "Why would you deal with my child in a fight? That was none of your business. It was at lunchtime, they're off school grounds two or three blocks down." (Alex)

For example, as the parent of the victim, a fight could be considered "violence" and the expectation would be that the perpetrator would be dealt with severely. On the other hand, parents of perpetrators did not always share the school's view as to the seriousness of their child's actions or they felt that the school was interfering in non-school business:

> We're trying in many cases to teach them to behave in a way that they don't see at home. They see Mom and Dad at home fighting and using profane language and

> getting up on each other and throwing people out like they're yesterday's garbage. (Lane)

When asked who they felt were perpetrators of violence in their schools, all of the principals agreed that, theoretically, "violence" could be at the hands of both staff and students. However, within the context of their own school, two participants were not willing to consider that their students were victims of staff violence:

> I mean, I couldn't say 80 or 90 percent , but in a great majority of the cases, children feel that they are being victimized and that their actions are somehow minimal and that the teacher's expectations are somehow out of line. I think the (students) feel picked on in some instances. But it's not violent. (Cory)

With the exception of Cory, all of the principals noted that the behaviors and attitudes of a small proportion of their staff were problematic. Jeri gave a recent example that required intervention. A staff member was reminded that he was not communicating in an appropriate way with other staff and students in the school. Despite the discomfort this action created, it was important to Jeri that a clear message be sent that violence was not just a "child problem." Furthermore, it was the direct responsibility of the principal to deal with such matters. Alex shared a view echoed by the ten principals, stating that high expectations for behavior must include staff, not just students.

Chris, whose school had a history of prior violence and served what was considered to be a "tough group of kids," cited parents as a source of violence. Whereas this was a comment expressed by only one of the participants of this study, it is worthwhile noting. In speaking with staff, Chris indicated that the major concern was the

abuse and threats of violence towards teachers from parents. Although all principals agreed that some parents could be unsupportive, inconsistent in dealing with violence at the school level, or poor role models; Chris was the only principal in this study who considered parents as perpetrators of violence. Interestingly, he also described violence in schools as "mental or physical abuse from one *student* [italics added for emphasis] to another."

Summary

When asked to describe school violence within the context of their schools, principals noted that: (a) violence was difficult to define; (b) violence could include a number of behaviors along a continuum, ranging from serious physical acts of aggression, to more covert behaviors such as intimidation; (c) they were less concerned with defining violence than understanding and addressing the root causes of violence.

In identifying the causes of violence, principals stated that the configuration of junior high schools (e.g., three years, feeder schools) contributed to the difficulty in establishing the caring climate that students needed to experience a sense of belonging. Without this connectedness, students would be more prone to feelings of rejection, and frustration, responding with violence.

Although two principals rejected the idea that staff could exhibit violent behaviors themselves (e.g., intimidation, harassment), the majority of respondents felt that principals must exercise vigilance in ensuring that expectations and accountability for behavior is applied towards staff and students alike.

Influences on Decisions Related to School Violence

The following sections will address those findings relevant to 2 subproblems: *What influences principals to adopt strategies to address school violence? What are the relationships among principal's experiences, their definitions of violence, their expectations of schools, and their chosen response to school violence?*

The Perceived Role of Schools

Principals were keenly aware of the changing dynamics of the family, and although they understood that it was beyond the formal mandate of schools, they were prepared and committed to filling the gap left by those homes that did not always provide adequate emotional support for their children. By providing safety, security, and healthy relationships, schools could give students the feeling of acceptance and the sense of community often lacking in their home lives. As Kale summarized, schools should not focus on teaching subjects, as much as imparting skills and values: to have a love of learning, confidence in themselves, good problem solving skills, and a tolerance for difference in other people.

Schools were seen as service providers, and principals felt that educators, especially principals, had to realign their thinking and recognize that they were accountable to and for students. Several principals used the service metaphor to indicate that schools needed to view students more as "clients" and "important customers." As service providers, teachers were accountable for delivering a quality education that best met the unique needs of each student. The loss of a student through an expulsion, was

thus considered to be an indication that the school had failed to properly identify and meet those needs.

In the junior high school setting, principals believed that schools had a responsibility to impart more than academic knowledge on students. As a microcosm of society, schools not only reflected its values but were bastions of hope for changing values. Regardless of the views of some parents and colleagues, principals believed that schools did have the responsibility for teaching values as well as academics:

> In working with kids, curriculum is secondary and that is where some teachers are running into problems. Its because they're driving the curriculum before they're driving the student because all their mind is curriculum, not the students and if that's it, you're dead. (Pat)

Although principals were of the opinion that it was not reflected by current provincial or board directives, they believed that in the junior high school environment curriculum played a secondary role. The process of engaging students in cooperative learning and developing the whole child (e.g., emotional and intellectual) should be the greatest concern of educators. Unfortunately, the current focus on achievement tests detracted from the more important mission of schooling. Jeri explained the frustration shared by many of the principals, stating that there were still staff members who embraced an antiquated belief that their job at school was to deliver programs, "fetch back some information," ignore the personalities of the students, and dismiss the issue of students' rights because students had no rights. In contrast, principals in this study believed that schools must reflect and reinforce the democratic principles practiced in

society and accord students with a balance between rights and responsibilities, academic and social skills. This could not be achieved without a deliberate commitment to knowing and caring for students.

Views on Leadership

Principals were well aware of the daunting task posed by trying to meet the needs of students. At a minimum, they saw the need for a visible leader whose sense of caring for students was not bounded by time, place, or traditional views on the role of the principal. Alex was one of a number of principals who made a concerted effort to increase his contact with students by coaching sports teams. This was often perceived as a tactic for putting aside the paperwork and exercising "visible leadership."

Maintaining visible contact with students in the school and in the community, was regarded as an integral component of the principal's role:

> They've got to see you. They've got to see you daily and they've got to see you on the holiday and they've got to see you outside. That's just a given, because if they don't see you and all they see you is in here [school], forget it. It doesn't work. (Jamie)

Although principals were highly motivated to preserve a high visibility with students, administrative demands imposed a constraint on their ability to do so. Chris spoke of the frustration of the job, expressing feelings of anxiety at the high frequency of meetings that took her away from the school. She struggled with the changes in the district that imposed administrative and managerial tasks which compromised her ability to know the students. However, when the opportunity presented itself, principals made

every attempt to demonstrate their commitment to students. Chris provided an example of mediating a fight between two students that reflected this view. The boys involved were ushered into Chris's office and told that a resolution of the conflict was his only priority, adding: "I don't care if there are parents, I don't care if the mayor comes, I will be here to help you solve this."

Although limited by having to deal with the daily demands of administrative tasks, principals made every effort to forge relationships with students that were often prone to criticism:

> I talk to them [students] about drinking. Their drinking on weekends. Well, we had quite a discussion. "This is none of your business." And I said: "Maybe you're right. I'm concerned about you. . .it is my business if this comes into the school. It is my business if you're planning your Friday night activities Friday afternoon in our school." (Alex)

A questioning of their involvement with students came from staff as well as students. Jamie remarked at how surprised the school secretary was at his announcement that students would be welcome in his office at any time and that there was no need for formalities (e.g., setting an appointment). The secretary responded by noting that students only visited the principal when they were "in trouble." "No," Jamie responded, "kids are going to come here to just sit and talk, so you'd just better get used to that."

The importance of leadership and the effect it had on the school community was recognized by all principals. In many ways, it was intentionally used as a way of bringing about change and putting one's personal "stamp" on the school. A commitment to

students, and a genuine desire to relate to them, was a philosophy they intentionally modeled to staff in belief that "all things important, start at the top" (Jamie).

As a new principal, Kale concurred with Jamie's views, that modeling was an effective strategy. As a newcomer, the ability to introduce a philosophy, a "personal stamp, " was also seen as a great advantage for Kale. Irrespective of the length of their term as principal, respondents spoke of the continuing need to change attitudes of those staff who could not appreciate the importance of caring about the work habits, time management or social skill development of students. In the end, they hoped that time would afford them the opportunity to change such attitudes.

Philosophy Underlying Practices

Discipline. One of the most poignant illustrations of the influence of personal beliefs on decisions was linked to the choices principals made with respect to student discipline. Discipline was not seen as a form of punishment for misbehavior. There was no mention of discipline as a deterrent or as a form of retribution. Rather, any sanctions placed on students were seen as a way of teaching students about the choices they made and the consequences of their behaviors. At the core of disciplinary decisions was the basic belief in the "golden rule" and the need for forgiveness and understanding:

> I'm certainly going to make a mistake some day and if I make a mistake how do I want to be treated? Do I want to be roasted and walked down the street in parade or would I like somebody to show some compassion and appreciation for the good things that I've been able to do along the way. If I like to be treated that way, then perhaps other people might like to be treated that way. (Joele)

The uniqueness of each situation and the special needs of individual students drove decisions regarding measures taken when students acted in a violent or disruptive manner. The traditional method of uniformly applied standards and consequences was abandoned in favour of using discretion and understanding. Different approaches and sensitivity to the "baggage" that students often brought to school resulted in a distaste for rules, in favour of building trust, respect, and understanding between and amongst staff and students. Consistency was not viewed as equal consequences for similar misbehavior, but rather as equally applied compassion and attention to the needs of all students, victims, perpetrators, and witnesses:

> When I came, the first thing that I said was, if you want a strong disciplinarian - if you look that word up in the dictionary it talks about enforcer, autocratic - and I said you've got the wrong person . . . every situation is different and so when we're dealing with kids on discipline issues. . . we will deal with each individual individually. . . look at the child, the situation, and then deal with it so that it is what's best for that kid. (Kale)

Andi spoke of the guiding principles which formed the basis for dealing with discipline. At issue was knowing how students learned and what the school could do to facilitate the acquisition of "gifts" that they would leave junior high school with. Discipline was a way of learning, growing, and trying a different response the next time a situation arose.

Although each school had a written set of behavioral expectations, there was a deliberate deemphasis on rules:

> . . . you have a list on the left side of crimes and a list on the right side of exactly the recipe for punishment for those things: they don't work very well . . . . Are we really student-centered, do we really respect the people? If the answer is "yes" then we'd better not be using terms like "I'm the authority in this classroom and if you don't like it then get out." As soon as we're using those kinds of things . . .we're not working in a caring culture. (Lane)

Principals stressed the importance of maintaining "judgment rights," over "policy rights," which enabled decisions to be made in the best interests of the students. Effectively, rules and punishment were not deemed to be as effective as expectations and learning from one's mistakes.

School documents that were provided were consistent with what principals stated in their interviews. Moreover, documents represented a deliberate attempt on the part of principals to frame discipline in a positive light - a guideline for what the school was striving to achieve, as opposed to what they hoped to reduce:

> Our goal is to develop a safe and secure learning environment where students and staff feel protected, respected and included. (Cory's school handbook)

Each principal recognized that an overemphasis on rules led to increased tension with students as they attempted to test, break, or challenge rules with little understanding or ownership of their actions. That is why students were expected to develop a sense of community and, by so doing, gain control and ownership for their behavior and that of others. A conscious decision to move away from a discipline strategy based on adherence to rules was a view principals shared, as exemplified by Alex's comment:

> I hate the term rules. Rules are black and white and I think that's when you run into a problem, because sometimes there's grey stuff. So, we talk about expectations.

Principals saw a distinct goal in discipline: to prepare students for adulthood by instilling in them a set of values and skills in positive problem solving. These, they believed, could not be achieved by forcing students to follow rules for the sake of compliance with authority. Finally, principals believed that rules did not provide the necessary latitude for students to reflect on their behavior and the effect it had on others.

Zero tolerance policy. Although I did not raise the topic myself, it was typically not long into the discussion about defining violence before principals redirected the conversation to their district's zero tolerance policies. Zero tolerance was an important school board policy that principals wished to clarify in terms of how they operationalized it. It represented a policy interpretation that was taking two different directions in the district's schools: as a mechanism to remove problem students or as a refusal to ignore inappropriate behaviors. All 12 principals in this study took the latter view and were emphatic and unyielding in their reasons for it. Of all topics discussed in the interview, zero tolerance most capsulated the personal values of principals.

On several occasions, they linked their personal philosophy of schooling, discipline, and what adolescents needed, to how they applied the zero tolerance policy of their school board. Simply stated: they did not "buy into" any policy designed to "kick kids out of school." As Cory indicated, it was ridiculous to think that schools could: "wipe violence out of society by excluding members of society that contribute to what the

society is." Principals were unanimous in their refusal to either ignore violent behaviors, or pass the problem to someone else to fix. This, they felt, was a key issue that separated their application of the zero tolerance policy from that of other colleagues. Furthermore, they were not reluctant to share these views with senior district administration:

> A year ago the system adopted a zero tolerance policy . . . any student who is guilty of this or that will be suspended or expelled. I went bananas and I said I can't live with that . . . I said, "do you guys have any idea how many kids we're putting on the street. Who's going to deal with them?" (Bobbie)

Principals noted that they would not subscribe to any practice that denied students the privilege of attending school simply because they engaged in inappropriate behaviors. In fact, they cited numerous examples of students succeeding because the school did not give up on them. Fran spoke of the hypocrisy of suggesting that, on the one hand, students at risk need attachment and supportive relationships but, on the other hand, expelling them to another school was deemed "in their best interests." "I cannot live without closure," Fran continued, "I need to know that I have done all that I can to help a kid." In essence, these principals saw zero tolerance as a totally unacceptable practice that went against their most fundamental beliefs about schooling and the needs of children.

Previous Experience

With the exception of one, all of the study's participants had been principals in other schools. For the five that had previously been in "high-needs" schools, the experience was deemed influential in how they approached the issue of school violence:

> Things were exactly the same when I taught at Cape Horn School and all those tough areas. We did exactly the same things . . . I mean I was there for 13 years and doing exactly the same things here, but some of the folks in our profession have let that go and that's wrong. (Jamie)

High needs schools in this district are those that cater to disadvantaged youth, many of whom come from abusive or inattentive home environments. Principals of such schools explained how they were often required to attend to the physical (e.g., hot lunches), legal (e.g., court orders), and emotional (e.g., counselling) needs of students. At times, fulfilling these needs superseded meeting academic objectives. Principals viewed the students in "high needs" schools as fragile and requiring a sense of belonging and adults who cared. Jamie spoke of the "tough kids" that he never gave up on. Many of these students eventually succeeded and this was attributed to a school discipline plan based on forgiveness, understanding, and a staff that were committed to making their school a place that students wanted to be in.

Although the physical and emotional needs of students were perhaps not as pronounced in the "regular" schools that principals were currently in, their underlying philosophy and attitudes towards children remained constant. They remained steadfast in their opposition to the removal of students through zero tolerance policies and firmly believed in taking an active role in building a safe and caring school climate.

Summary

Principals were asked to describe what influenced their decisions regarding school violence. The findings presented were drawn from remarks explicitly stated by

principals, as well as those concepts inferred by connecting related themes during data analysis. The four dominant areas of influence were principals': (a) perceived role of schools, (b) personal perspectives on leadership, (c) philosophy underlying practices, and (d) previous experience.

Central to these influences was the core value of placing the needs and best interests of students at the center of decisions. Principals - many of whom had administered "high needs" schools - were influenced by their belief that schools were responsible for imparting values, social skills, as well as subject knowledge.

One of the central needs identified was that of a visible principal who could set aside administrative duties for the sake of relating to students. By modeling behaviors (e.g., getting to know students) congruent with their beliefs about schooling, principals were also compelled to shape the attitudes and behaviors of their staff.

The underlying philosophy of treating others with respect and understanding was reflected in the non-punitive approach that principals followed towards discipline. Rules-based discipline was viewed as an inappropriate and ineffective mechanism for controlling students. In its place, principals elected to set behavioral expectations for staff and students, often extending those expectations of students beyond the walls of the school. A rejection of the school board's zero tolerance policy exemplified the participants' refusal to "give up" on students. They saw the expulsion of a student as a failure of the school to identify and effectively respond to the needs of that student.

Decision Making

To this point, I have presented the findings relevant to: (a) principals' conceptualization of school violence, and (b) the primary influences on decisions related to school violence. In the following section, two areas: identifying needs, and validating options, will be discussed. These related to subproblem 4: *What processes are involved in making decisions to address school violence?*

Identifying Needs

An awareness and understanding for the unique needs of adolescent students, influenced many of the strategies principals introduced or supported. Knowledge of what those needs would be were drawn from principals' personal beliefs and those facilitative processes they arranged that would best determine needs.

Although principals did not discount the desirability of dealing proactively with issues, they felt that basing decisions on identified needs, was more realistic. As Cory stated: "I think a lot of what goes on in schools has that component of reactive positioning and posturing and that's not all necessarily bad." Jamie's comment reflected the sentiments of all of the participants, noting that "I'm not going to go out there preventing violence; I'm going out there to build a great school."

Personal beliefs. Principals, like Alex, believed that the reason teenagers came to school was to be with their friends. As a group, teenagers often acquired an attitude of self-importance and a belief that the world revolved around them. What they needed was someone to understand the way that they were, and talk to, not harass them or "pull rank."

Unfortunately, adults (e.g., teachers and parents) often forget that 13 and 14 - year - olds are still young and underdeveloped in terms of social skills. Too often, as Jeri pointed out, adults forget what it was like to be a teenager: knowing that, despite their mistakes, they will be cared for and forgiven. Thus, as Kale explained, approaches to discipline were typically based on the need to view misbehavior as an opportunity to acquire appropriate social skills:

> . . . it's not a situation where you bring them in, you yell and scream and say you've done this and don't do it again and we send them off. It's a teaching opportunity and it's a learning opportunity for the kid. Kids when they're growing up are going to make mistakes and I say that a hundred times a week. They make a mistake, okay so now we need to help them grow and learn from the mistake.

Participants spoke fondly of teenagers and expressed a deep appreciation for the struggles that they were facing, as well the need for schools to elevate the image of young people in the community:

> As adults, we expect so much of kids and when you go to the golf course, they'll go on, "Oh those kids are so bad nowadays, hey, whooo man; they're fighting and they're doing all this bad stuff." Hey hold on. We have great kids here at Alpha Junior High. They come to school to learn. (Jamie)

Bobbie believed that there were key benefits derived from efforts directed at raising the image of teenagers: (a) building students' self-esteem, and (b) demonstrating to adults that their school's students were responsible, contributing members of the community. Providing opportunities to succeed and recognizing efforts to succeed, were

ways in which students acquired a belief in themselves. Bobbie indicated how she would make this belief evident, showing me the new banner that would hang at the entrance to the school. It read: "Through these halls walk champions."

Personal beliefs, that influenced needs' assessment, seemed to be closely linked to options that would not be considered viable (e.g., zero tolerance practices and rule-driven discipline). Zero tolerance as a means of removing students through suspension or expulsion was seen as a failure to meet the needs of students. Principals felt that they had a personal responsibility and obligation to look after their students and they were not prepared to pass the problem on to another school. "Throwing kids out" for misbehavior was not the answer, nor was it perceived as a measure of successfully reducing school violence. Rather, it was viewed as a failure of school staff to address the needs of kids:

> Two of the teachers were very, very happy that this [student suspension] had happened. In fact, there was almost cheering and I said: "You know, this is the only business that I know of where we cheer if we lose a customer." (Lane)

Principals did not suggest that assessing the needs of students was an easy task. It required a concerted effort to recognize that multiple influences were often at play: (a) the home environment, (b) individual strengths and shortcomings, and (c) the dynamics of peer influences. Perhaps one student needed a different approach than another student, Lane noted. In the end, however, the goal was always "to be doing it better and more caring and more sensitive than before."

Facilitating a Process

Staff. One of the most important strategies that principals employed to enable effective decision making was in selecting staff who shared their beliefs about students and the role of schools. Towards this end, they played a lead role in the hiring process itself, and establishing selection criteria that closely aligned with their personal views. Bobbie reflected on the personal satisfaction that arose from hiring 13 teachers last year, all of whom shared her views of children. These were staff who had proven, over the past year, that they could relate to students and engage them in "things that mattered."

In Alex's view, potential candidates had to demonstrate a genuine desire to challenge students to be their best and an ethic of caring for kids. One of the questions he asked in these interviews was: "what can you contribute to enhance the quality of life for students and staff?"

Chris and Alex also remarked on how the responsibility for high quality staff did not end after the hiring process:

> I probably have documented and "gotten rid of" more teachers than probably any other principal in the system right now. And that's not that they weren't nice people. I didn't care about them, but they weren't doing their work . . .The people I have on staff are very, very strong relaters, they really care about kids. A lot of them, interestingly have PhysEd degrees. (Chris)

Alex also spoke of her ongoing role of challenging those teachers who were not living up to what was expected of staff and students. Despite the difficulty in approaching

teachers who "berated kids," Alex stated that she would "bite the bullet" and inform them of the inappropriateness of their behavior towards students.

Hiring the "right people" allowed principals to be confident in knowing that their staff could be given a good deal of autonomy and that they could be trusted to "get the *right* job done." Over 27 new staff had been hired by Chris in the past two years, and, in his view, the positive school climate and academic excellence were a factor of their desire to: (a) team teach, (b) have fun together, (c) implement his general plans. Accordingly, Chris felt confident that he could step back from the detail and say to his staff: "here are your kids, do what you need to do; you're the professionals."

For the longest serving principals, distancing themselves from the detailed decision-making process was a learning experience. Jeri stated that he now understood the value of hiring staff that could be trusted and empowered to devise effective strategies to address identified concerns. He regretted that this lesson had taken over 20 years to learn, and reflected on how worthwhile it was to transfer ownership of achieving expectations to those closest to the problems.

School structure. Even with outstanding staff, principals were aware of the constraints of resources that challenged the ability for teachers to provide an optimum learning environment. For this reason, they saw a need to structure their junior high schools in such a way as to maximize the opportunities for building the type of relationship between teachers and students, that would ultimately improve academic and social growth. To this end, nine had reconfigured their junior high schools into what were termed "teaching and learning communities." Of the three schools that did not have the

school within a school setup, one was due to a small junior high school population of approximately 300 students, while the other two were restructuring into smaller units in the near future.

The Teaching and Learning Community (TLC) structure was based on creating schools within schools, pods of students and teachers at a ratio of approximately 55 students for a team of two teachers:

> We've organized the school so there's a group of grade 7 teachers, grade 8 and grade 9 which are called learning communities. They are responsible for teaching their students . . . we've tried a lot of team teaching. So it's possible that a student will have only two teachers for core subjects during the year . . .What it does, it focuses on the needs of the student first, the need being security and stability . . . we don't look for control, we look for teaching and learning. I like to think of it as TLC being "tender loving care" communities. (Joele)

In some of the schools, these groupings were grade-specific, and in others, all grades were intermixed. Pat and Cory saw a number of benefits attained from designing their junior high schools in this manner: (a) less dependency on one specialized staff member (e.g., a guidance counsellor), (b) providing staff with experience in teaching across the curriculum, (c) providing a structure wherein students and teachers had the opportunity to better come to know one another, and facilitating a process for accessing students' needs.

In the opinion of the principals whose schools followed this model, the teaching-learning center architecture offered: (a) teachers the chance to plan more time with their

students unconstrained by traditional 50 minute periods; (b) students the stability that comes from dealing with only a few teachers; (c) enriched teaching due to the pairing of team teachers, such as a Math with a Science teacher; (d) an opportunity to recapture the sense of community found in the "one room schoolhouse."

Even though principals admitted that the research they had read pointed them to the benefits of creating schools-within-schools at the junior high level, they felt that the decision to move in this direction was based on answering an identified need, rather than following a trend. Joele spoke of the flexibility attributable to the learning community (LC) structure, allowing for larger blocks of time that could be allocated to unique programs. In Joele's school, there were a number of students whose lives were collapsing and they were seriously considering leaving school altogether. The large blocks of time that could be accommodated in the LC structure gave teachers the opportunity to design a meaningful program for these students (e.g., the Outreach Program). As Joele remarked, "they were just responding to a need."

For Kale, the benefit of the schools-within-a-school configuration lay in the ability to respond to students more effectively. The ratio had been reduced to four teachers for every 150 students, and the results pointed to a more personalized schooling experience for the children.

Andi described the school organization as consisting of 600 students, divided into three small communities that were identified with just six teachers. Over the span of three years, these teachers work with their 200 students and come to understand their behavior

patterns and specific needs. It was also easier to recognize issues (e.g., student conflicts) and deal with them sooner.

Students. Giving students "voice" was a way of validating decisions being considered by principals. Concerted efforts to understand students' needs as well as valuing their opinions of the school were addressed in many ways:

> We've been working at giving students increased voice. So one of the things that I did - it grew out of kids in the classroom talking to kids - I met with ten kids from each room of the school. So there were 25 periods meeting with kids in terms of what they saw as problems in the schools and what they saw in the streets and how they would like it to grow and change. (Bobbie)

This commitment to "hearing" students was consistent with the overall belief statement Bobbie expressed later in the interview. Students were a part of the cooperative enterprise of schooling, and as such deserved respect and input into those decisions which affected them. Their contribution to the learning environment was considered invaluable and principals often found students to be an ideal sounding board for the new strategies that they had been considering. Bobbie's beliefs were not unique amongst the participants, and many of the strategies of opening dialogue with students were rooted in the desire to provide a school that was built on healthy relationships and a sense of belonging to a community.

Andi termed these conversations with students as "fireside chats." As often as possible, Andi and his vice-principal walked and talked with students in the halls, or invited them into the office. They asked the students "how things were going," and what

needed "tuning up." This strategy was considered particularly effective when the stress level of teachers was rising. The information students provided could often alert Andi to why students were misbehaving or what teachers needed to do to decrease the level of frustration amongst the students.

At first, Chris acknowledged that students were suspicious of the invitation to share their concerns or suggestions. In time, after realizing that many of their ideas had been acted upon, students became convinced that the administration was genuinely trying to identify and meet the needs of students.

Staff. Although principals recognized that students were expected to acquire subject knowledge, they also felt that life skills and emotional literacy were just as critical. Determining what those specific skills would be, was largely a factor of what the perceived "hot spots" were. Principals relied on the judgment and knowledge of their staff to best determine those needs.

Joele spoke of harassment as an issue that several of the teachers and counsellors considered problematic. In conjunction with student leaders and staff members, the need was identified: to raise awareness amongst students as to the deleterious effects harassment could have on the climate of their school. Although he had heard of the school district's recent initiatives in the area of harassment, Joele was not prepared to devote resources to an issue unless it was identified to be one at his school.

In other examples, students were having difficulties in concentrating in afternoon classes. Although Fran suspected as much, he consulted with staff to verify that a number of students regularly came to school without a lunch. Undernourished, these students

found it difficult to perform well in their afternoon classes and were often the perpetrators of disruptive or aggressive behaviors. It was subsequently decided that the school would provide a "hot lunch" program. The identification of this need and the implementation of related strategies would not have been possible without a close working relationship between the staff and principal.

Admittedly, a close relationship was more likely to exist when principals had confidence in their staff and believed that they shared a common philosophy:

> I also have a school with an incredible number of leaders in it. I don't even like the word "empower" because I didn't have to do that. These people listen to kids' voices. (Bobbie)

Principals were quick to point out that a shared philosophy came with effort. Bobbie admitted that it was not always easy to hold back from imposing her values on everyone in the school. She added that the concept of collaboration was difficult for someone who had exercised bureaucratic leadership for so many years. "Throwing out ideas, and prodding people to think," were ways in which Bobbie could empower staff while still ensuring that decisions reflected her values. Metaphorically, she likened herself to a "messiah."

Chris also struggled with the concept of empowerment, believing that it was a never ending cycle:

> I get this image in my mind of standing in a room in our house, wine bottles with a garden hose and you know, a few drops go in each bottle and before another drop goes in and the first one's kind of evaporated or you can take the time and

> stand and fill each one up . . . I don't like the garden hose approach, the sprinkler thing works with the staff.

Relationships. Chris echoed a theme that was consistently discussed by principals. After interviewing the fourth principal, I recognized "relationships" as a dominant theme, and probed this in future interviews:

> You talk a lot about relationships. So have others that I have interviewed. Could you tell me a bit more about that. (Interviewer)
>
> We have an extended family and it's made a very significant difference in the whole milieu of the school. . .the biggest strategy of all is that we have really tried to modify the curriculum to better meet the kids' needs, to have close relationships between the teachers and the kids. (Chris)

Principals spoke of connecting students and staff, forming attachments, and setting up channels of communication. Fran suggested that schools would never succeed in solving problems if there were not relationships to provide a context, a background to understanding the problem. His rejection of zero tolerance was based on the notion that the new school, to which the expelled students had been sent, would be compromised in its dealings with the student because there was no prior relationship to build upon.

The way we treat people, the assumptions we make about behavior, the manner in which we communicate, care, and trust one another, were deemed essential ingredients of relationship building that principals identified. Each of the participants believed that the same "rules" applied whether students, parents, or staff were involved. As Bobbie stated, "you are either a caring-relationship person or not, there is no half way."

In reflecting on the role of educators, Fran believed that junior high school staff often assume that the need to be genuinely interested in and care about the lives of their students ends at elementary school. "Too many teachers take on this "professor" attitude, like "I'm a scholar, not a nice person," Fran reflected. And for him, this was simply intolerable in the K-12 system.

Influenced by their personal philosophy of discipline and perspectives on leadership, they made decisions that would best achieve their goals. Each of the principals highly valued their staff, and as such ensured that some form of collaborative decision making took place:

> I mean, I don't purport to have all the answers and I don't say "well this is how it's going to be and you put up or shut up". . . but unless we have the same common set of beliefs and values, we don't have a decision-making process. (Kale)

Summary

When asked how they made decisions related to school violence, one principal responded by asking: "Do you mean what have I done for these kids? Would providing a hot lunch program count?" This reply was suggestive of the way in which such decisions were made. Firstly, principals identified needs on the basis of their understandings of adolescents. Secondly, principals facilitated a process by which needs could be identified. Hiring and empowering "like-minded" staff, and restructuring schools into smaller units (e.g., Learning Communities), provided principals with a trusted, and "grass-root" opinion of what the students required. The options that surfaced from the smaller learning

communities were assessed against the feedback from students and staff, actively sought by the principals.

Perceived Outcomes

The following section will present the findings that link decisions to outcomes, and provide principals' perspectives on their effectiveness. The two areas: improvements in school climate, and positive public relations will address the final subproblem of the study which asked: *To what extent are responses to school violence considered to be effective by principals and the literature?*

Improvements in School Climate

In discussions regarding how school violence was defined, principals found it easier to describe the type of environment that they were responsible for establishing: one that would reject physical, emotional or verbal harassment, as opposed to defining violence. Thus, creating and sustaining a safe and caring school climate, not reducing or preventing school violence, quickly emerged as the central goal of principals. For this reason, what began as a discussion of school violence, quickly transformed into one of school climate.

What constituted an "ideal" school climate was linked to many variables such as the principal's personal philosophy of discipline, understanding and attending to the unique needs of adolescents, and redefining the objectives of schooling. Principals suggested that violence did not take hold in a school where students felt cared for, capable, and connected. Decisions were thus focused on finding ways to make that

happen; to "make kids feel good about themselves and good about being at school" (Andi). This was the responsibility of every staff member. According to Lane, schools struggle when teachers refuse to resolve issues of behavior and operate on the premise that "the person in the office will be the keeper of discipline." Safety in a school was dependent on a climate wherein students were: (a) willing to trust adults, (b) expressing their concerns, and (c) asking for help. Cory believed so strongly in the need to achieve such a climate, that he included the following in the school handbook:

> Our goal is to create a climate for learning where continuous improvements are sought in the areas of student engagement and achievement, effective teaching and assessment strategies, student self-esteem.

When asked how they knew that the decisions taken had affected the level of violence in their schools, principals indicated that they did not deliberately gather data on a reduction of violent incidents. Although a few noted that their schools had experienced a reduction in the number of student fights, the more significant indicator was the "gut feeling" that their school was a good place for students and staff to be in. Andi stated that "it just felt right," and Pat remarked how there is "something in the air, an atmosphere in the building that says everything is okay."

Principals were confident in "knowing" that they were making the right choices for their students and staff, that the climate of the school had improved, and that the environment was conducive to teaching and learning. Central to shaping such an environment were the connections made amongst the school members themselves.

One of the most prevalent themes that emerged from the interviews was that of relationships: building as well as maintaining them. Trust, mutual respect, good communications, and a desire to take the time to know the students were key elements to forging relationships that resulted in a positive school climate. Principals recognized that the very nature of schools, based upon continuous interactions between staff and students, necessitated time and effort devoted to nurturing these relationships. As Kale remarked: "Our business is about people. I don't push paper very well. I hate that part of the job and I don't do it well. I like people and I want to deal with relationship issues." At the same time, principals were quick to point out that such ethos outcomes were difficult to measure in terms of current government accountability assessments:

> How do you know that you've made a difference? (Interviewer)
>
> I can tell by talking with people because they're just as enthusiastic, they want to try more things. They're still talking what's good for kids. . . the kids are positive. It feels right and that's where sometimes that's just not good enough. You can't go up to the Minister of Education and say: "Gee, this feels right." (Joele)

Positive Public Relations

One of the outcomes of decisions to implement strategies that would meet the needs of students was linked to promoting a positive image of teenagers:

> We try to emphasize to kids that we're a neighbour in the community . . . we encourage the kids to greet people when they come into the school. We tell them, you know, surprise them [visitors] and show them that a teenager knows how to smile and can be polite . . . its good PR for the kids themselves. (Andi)

Linked to his personal beliefs of adolescents and the identified need to promote a positive image of teens, Lane discussed his relentless efforts to counter the negative portrayal of young people in the media. Typically, he stated, there were few facts involved in the accounts. In response to those parents or members of the public who labeled teenagers as trouble makers, Lane suggested: "count your blessings, look around you, we have great kids in this school."

Enhancing the reputation of the school and its students was of particular importance in those schools that had experienced an incident of violence which captured negative media attention. One principal in particular, stated that his school's efforts to reestablish itself as a safe place for kids had been successful. In a few short years, it had regained the confidence of parents and now had long waiting lists of families who were trying to enroll their children. Bobbie noted that, unfortunately, for a junior high school a good reputation was a fragile status. Although he would always deal with even the most serious act of violence that occurred in the school, Bobbie would also use every means possible to keep knowledge of the incident from reaching the media.

> Even in a school like this with really a pretty outstanding reputation, that reputation of non-violence is very, very fragile . . . . And I've learned that no matter what goes on in the school, you don't call 911. They [the media] monitor those, but there's other numbers that you can use to get them [emergency response] here.

In an environment where students' needs were attended to, students themselves became spokespersons for the positive outcomes:

> These kids have tremendous pride in their school. They feel very, very proud of their school and they just love to have visitors come in so they can strut their stuff. (Andi)

A focus on positive public relations was linked, in many ways, to the view of schools as "service providers." Principals often referred to students as "clients," schools as a "business," and outcomes as "products." These metaphors, when analyzed within the context of the entire interview, were appropriate, and did not diminish the value of schooling. Quite the contrary. By envisioning themselves as service providers, principals imposed on themselves and their staffs a high level of accountability:

> I guess I would hope that it's like some businesses put in their windows: if you like the product tell your friends, tell everybody. If you don't like the product, tell me. (Alex)

Too often, Chris remarked, administrators are lured into "gimmicky ideas" of how to improve the image of their schools. In his view, however, the best public relations came from students, who went home and spoke positively to their parents about the school.

Summary

Identifying the needs of students enabled a decision-making process that could better meet those needs (e.g., academic, emotional, social), which resulted in an improved school climate and positive public relations.

Principals admitted that few decisions were based on eliminating or preventing violence. Rather, they saw decisions driven by addressing needs and working towards

specific outcomes: (a) identifying the social and academic needs of students, which required and resulted in trust and respect; (b) meeting the needs of students, which required establishing meaningful relationships and resulted in increased student "voice," less disruptive behaviors, and a better teaching and learning environment; (c) building meaningful relationships and facilitating an understanding of the needs of students, which resulted in a positive school climate, recognized and appreciated by parents and the larger community.

Emergent Findings

During the course of data analysis, a number of findings emerged that were not a part of the tentative framework conceptualized at the onset of the study (see Figure 1). It was felt that the themes were significant enough to present in the following section.

School Environment

If symbols embody the cultural characteristics of organizations, then it was useful to glean from the interview process, whether or not there were any commonalities between principals in this regard. Twelve principals' offices were visited in the study. As soon as I arrived, I took notes in my journal, commenting on my impressions of the school's surroundings. From these observation, I made hypotheses regarding the school and its principal.

Pat's office was very "corporate." There were landscape paintings on the walls, a few very well looked after plants on the windowsill, certificates and diplomas hanging by the bookcase. I glanced around me, at the montage of books, journals, and articles,

carefully organized on the shelves. Soft music came from a corner radio. The table at which we sat, was free from any papers, as was Pat's desk. He was dressed in a stylish business suit, white shirt, and conservative tie. After I was escorted into his office, Pat greeted me with formality, and I wondered if I had been given the right "exemplary" principal's name.

In complete contrast, Kale and Bobbie's offices appeared to be sites of a disaster! Papers littered every corner of Kale's room. A few sadly neglected plants sat on the desk and a couple of half-eaten muffins lay on the table- perhaps even a few days old. When the telephone rang, it was difficult to locate its source . . . it was eventually found under a pile of forms. After trying, unsuccessfully, to find a place for my tape recorder on the guest table, I decided to leave it on the floor, amongst shoes, boxes, and books. Memos, students' notes, some artwork and a few posters adorned the walls. Dressed in a casual leisure suit, Kale greeted me warmly, as if we had been friends for a long time.

Bobbie's office was much the same as Kale's- without the muffins. It was showing signs of age, as was the school building. On my first visit, the secretary informed me that Bobbie was out at meetings all day; apparently he had forgotten about my appointment. Two days later, we met. Dressed informally-casual pants, shirt, and tie- he smiled sheepishly, saying: "I guess I really impressed you with my organizational skills?" At the end of the interview, we hugged.

As I was escorted by the school secretary into Alex's office, it was as if I had entered a pediatrician's waiting room. Taking a seat in the bright, cushioned chair, I gazed at the impressive collection of stuffed animals gathered on shelves, on the desk,

hanging from the ceiling. There were bubble gum dispensers, countless colourful posters on the walls, pictures of gorillas, bears, and all sorts of animals. There were inspirational sayings, and a wide assortment of students' artwork. With a beaming smile, dressed in a casual pair of slacks and a polo shirt, Alex welcomed me to "his home."

I have presented these findings with the intent of cautioning readers about the assumptions and judgments that can be erroneously made when gathering data. I was pleased to have had the privilege of interviewing all of the 12 principals in this study. After listening to their philosophies of what mattered in schools, I was humbled by the genuine ethic of caring that these principals had for their students. So too, by the lack of relationship between principals' offices and their view of leadership, schooling, and adolescents, I was reminded of an age old saying: "you can't judge a book by its cover."

In his book, *Images of Organization,* Morgan (1986) suggested that: "the use of a metaphor implies a way of thinking and a way of seeing that pervade how we understand our world" (p. 12). Remembering the number of occasions that participants in my study had used metaphorical language, I decided to once again revisit the transcripts, in search of examples of how, through the use of metaphors, I could gain further understanding.

Two dominant metaphors were consistently used in describing the expectations of schools: corporate metaphors, and relationship metaphors. These metaphors were linked to how principals described the role of schooling: from the perspective of parental or societal expectations, and from their personal point of view (e.g., schools as service-providers).

The corporate metaphors (e.g., foreclosure, client needs) related to issues of accountability and the positive public relations that would arise from meeting set objectives. As an example, Jeri maintained that, historically, educators felt that they had all the answers and that it was their prerogative to dictate how school would be run. This was shortsighted and as a service organization principals had to become more open to entertaining the needs and desires of students and parents. This openness was referred to as "union management meetings" by Lane who believed that schools would need to follow the same evolution from bureaucracy to participative decision making, as did the corporate sector.

Chris and Pat spoke of their schools as communities, whose members are forced to interact on a daily basis. As such, these members (e.g., staff and students) establish relationships with one another that are key to the ethos of the school. If these relationships are based on mutual respect, trust, and a commitment to working together for a common purpose, then school will be successful. On the other hand, students will neither relate well to their teachers nor to one another, if rules and the bureaucratic exercise of authority dominate the attitudes of teachers.

Jamie noted that, unfortunately, the current thinking in some of our junior high schools is that students have no rights, can provide little meaningful input, and are not interested in affection. "This is just nonsense," Jamie added. Teenagers need to be hugged, listened to, and invited to forge meaningful relationships with the teachers in their lives.

Chapter Summary

A Model of Principals' Decision Making Related to School Violence

The purpose of this study was to explore those variables which influenced principals' decisions regarding the policies, programs and strategies to deal with school violence at the junior high school level. Through the analysis of interview transcripts, a pattern of themes emerged that provided a connectedness amongst responses. On the basis of the findings, the process and the variables that influenced junior high school principals' decisions regarding school violence are depicted in Figure 2. The core category, from which all other categories stem (Strauss, 1987), was: how principals' conceptualized school violence. It was on the basis of this finding, that all issues discussed in the interviews derived meaning.

Principals found it difficult to define violence, largely due to the fact that they saw violence as a symptom of other problems upon which they focused more of their energies. Violent or disruptive behaviors were therefore symptomatic of a failure to understand and focus on the unique needs of adolescent youth.

In defining their leadership role, and the role of schooling, principals recognized that meeting the emotional as well as academic needs of students was critical; more critical than curriculum delivery. In order to facilitate this objective, they reinterpreted policies (e.g., zero tolerance) and embraced a humanitarian discipline model which was often contrary to their district's or staff's position. Expectations and assumptions that parents,

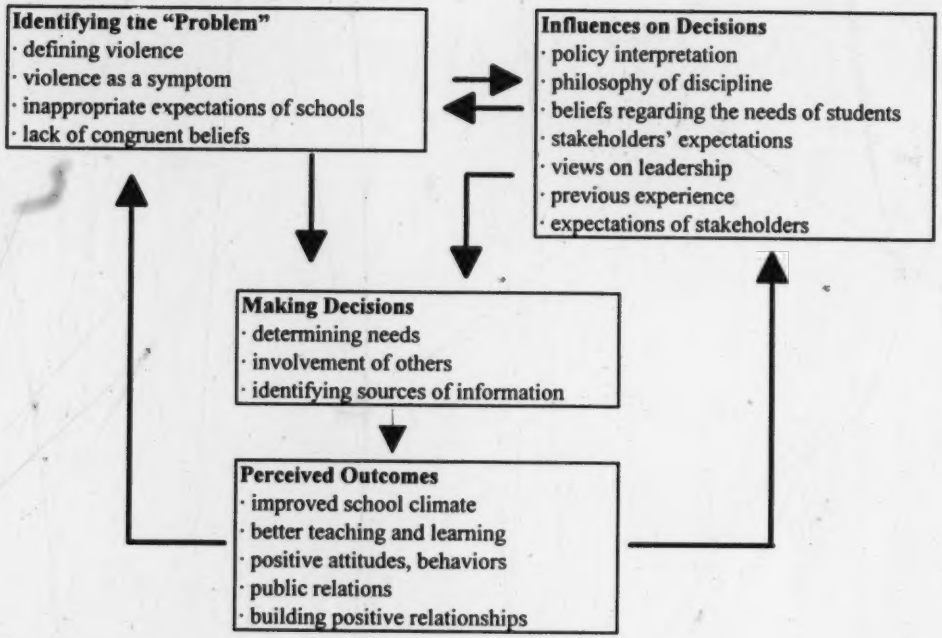

Figure 2. A Model of Principals' Decision Making Related to School Violence

and the larger community had of teenagers, were often perceived as incongruent with their own. The desire to give students a "voice" and advocate on their behalf grew out of this tension.

In order to provide students with an environment that met their needs and better facilitated a process for identifying those needs, principals reconfigured their schools into smaller units (e.g., TLCs, LCs) and encouraged an openness amongst staff and students that resulted in a school *community*. Staff were held accountable for the behaviors they modeled, and were encouraged to relate personally with their students, in the manner demonstrated by a "visible" principal.

The outcome of the decisions that principals made was not viewed as a reduction of school violence. Rather, outcomes such as an improved school climate and public relations resulted in a teaching and learning environment that was safe and caring.

Chapter 5

ACT V

Scene I: Front office area, Supleh High school, Friday afternoon

"Did you know that we're having a rumble in the parking lot?" an excited Mrs. Flint said running into Eneri's office. "The kids are out of control, and poor Cam is out there all by himself. We'd better call for the police, or something. My God, what are today's teens coming too? I wish I had never left elementary. The worst we had to deal with was a few bumps and bruises. And here, before you know it they'll be bringin' in guns. It's just not safe anymore."

"Calm down, Rose" Eneri comforted. "I'm sure it looks worse than it actually is. Why don't you just get back to class, and let administration deal with it. That's what we get paid those big bucks for, right?" Eneri smiled, but her words gave little comfort to an obviously distraught Mrs. Flint. Looking out her window, Eneri saw one graying, balding head amongst the sea of jackets and jeans.

Scene II: Supleh High School parking lot, Friday afternoon

"Don't think for a moment that we don't have cops on the way right now. We've been tipped off about this fight, and so you guys can just go on and get yourselves arrested. They'll be here in a matter of minutes" Cam shouted with confidence. "What a load of crap that is," muttered one of the bystanders. "You don't even have a clue what's goin' down here, and you don't care either so why don't you just leave man," another voice shouted from the crowd. As Cam stood pondering his next move, the crowd dispersed: some got into their cars, others just walked off towards the bus stop. One student turned back, and yelled to the tall blonde boy: "later buddy, you're dead!" "These kids watch too many stupid gangster movies, " thought Cam.

By the time Eneri arrived at Cam's side, only a few students remained. "Now, I thought you had all that paperwork to deal with. Didn't think I could handle it myself, did ya? You underestimate the control I have over these punks" Cam retorted. Eneri restrained from making a comment. "So, I suppose you fully understand what happened here and will give me a detailed account?" Eneri asked Cam. "For sure, although it was really no big deal. Problem solved," a confident and obviously contented Cam replied.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to describe and gain an understanding of how principals at the junior high level related to and responded to issues of school violence. The 12 principals interviewed shared their experiences and, in doing so, provided insights into a model of decision making that touched upon areas beyond those of violence. By offering their perspectives on what influenced their decisions, several process components were identified: (a) identifying the "problem," (b) responding to internal and external influences, (c) making decisions, and (d) evaluating decisions based on perceived outcomes.

These steps in the decision-making process, and the theoretical model that emerged, provide the basis for the discussion in this chapter. The findings and the model will be discussed in terms of the literature that had been reviewed in Chapter 2. Due to the emergent nature of this study, new literature, that was not part of the review presented in Chapter 2, will be interspersed in this chapter.

Addressing the Subproblems

Described School Violence

The first subproblem identified, asked the question: *How do principals describe the issue of school violence as they frame it in their schools?* This was an important first question for several reasons. Firstly, as Mawhinney (1994) suggested in her analysis of school violence policies in Ontario, policy solutions are typically grounded in how a problem is defined. Secondly, the literature indicated that there is little consistency in

defining school violence in Canadian schools. What does exist are a number of interpretations drawn from within a continuum of behaviors: the criminal or indictable offenses (e.g., assaults, vandalism) on the one end, to disruptive behaviors (e.g., disobedience, challenging authority) at the other end of this continuum. Along this line are varying degrees of harassment, emotional, and physical harm. If Mawhinney is correct in linking problem definition to policy solutions, understanding how the "problem" of school violence was defined by principals was an essential first step. As Enns (1981) observed, one's reference framework determines how observation are classified and the meanings assigned to them. Thirdly, studies that have asked (e.g., Alberta Teachers Association, 1997; MacDonald, 1995; Wall, 1995) school administrators about the nature and extent of violence in their schools have often presented paradoxical results. Although there appears to be a clear view that school violence is problematic (e.g., Alberta Teachers' Association, 1992), few principals believed that they had a "problem" with school violence within their own schools (MacDonald, 1995). The result can be a public that perceives schools to be in denial of violence, primarily for the purpose of maintaining a positive image. Ensuring that there was a clear conceptualization of "the problem" was regarded as a way of challenging assumptions that principals were in denial of violence.

Although the literature abounds with definitions of school violence that have been developed with input from teachers and principals (e.g., Alberta Education, 1993a; British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994; MacDougall, 1993), those principals in my study found it difficult to define the term.

When pressed, principals did offer a definition of school violence that was broad-based, allowing for a wide range of strategies to address the many behaviors this definition encompassed. Notwithstanding their attempts to respond to my question (i.e., how would you describe school violence?), principals were adamant that what I had assumed to be decisions they made regarding school violence, were, in fact, decisions addressing school climate. Once this point was clarified, the substance of the interviews no longer centered on describing school violence and decisions related to school violence. Mawhinney (1995) found that administrators who framed violence in terms of delinquency and deviance were more inclined to find solutions through the punishment and reform model. Seeing the issue as a one of school climate provided principals in my study with a rationale for focusing on strategies that would foster an atmosphere in which safe, caring, respectful, and responsible behaviors could flourish.

Current Canadian directions (e.g., The Canadian Education Association, 1996) are recasting "violent" behaviors as "disruptive" behaviors. They define such students as "continually disruptive, persistently defiant, demanding of attention or unmotivated" (p. 3). In this study, however, principals were more interested in suggesting possible school-based reasons for students discipline problems than they were in listing the behaviors themselves. Principals saw large class sizes, large schools, lack of extra-curricular activities, uninteresting work, and heavy teacher workloads to be the same contributing factors to misbehavior as did the participants of Clarke's study in 1977. They viewed boredom, power struggles between students and school staff, and poor student-teacher relations as directly contributing to disruptive behaviors in the classroom (Yonker, 1983).

Providing for the schooling needs of over 600 students with no provision for additional physical space, challenged principals to seek innovative solutions. By restructuring their schools into smaller units, principals were able to create a more personal and supportive environment that, as Hargreaves, Earl, and Ryan (1996) indicated, would allow teachers and students to know each other better, build trust, and personalize learning (p. 75).

Summary. According to Hargreaves, Earl, and Ryan (1996), Shostak (1986), Toby (1993), and Yonker (1983), school violence stems from problems such as: (a) unresolved conflict, (b) anger, (c) boredom, (d) rejection, and (e) unattended emotional needs. Violent behaviors can take many forms, as suggested in the definition of violence proposed in Chapter 2:

> Violence is the actual or threatened use of physical, verbal, sexual, or emotional power, intimidation, harassment, by or against individuals or groups which results in physical or psychological harm, or both, or is harmful to the social well-being of an individual or group. (MacDonald, 1997c)

Subsequent to the data analysis of this study, I believe that applying this definition of violence to the context of schools, makes an assumption that violence is the issue. The principals in this study stated that efforts to describe school violence neither represented the focus of their decisions, nor accounted for the student behaviors that were problematic. A lack of attachment, an atmosphere of mistrust and uncaring, were more applicable than terms such as aggression, harassment, and intimidation. As supported by the findings, the emergent definition of school violence is:

> Those actual or threatened behaviors or actions, that are symptomatic of an unfulfilled need (e.g., to belong, have power, seek approval), expressed in the form of sexual, emotional, or physical harm, that has a deleterious effect on establishing and maintaining a safe and caring school climate.

Sources of Influence in Addressing School Violence

Reframing the problem to a larger field than that of school violence, did not suggest that principals did not engage in violence prevention strategies or programs. Rather, it was the subproblem of my study: *What influences principals to adopt new strategies to address school violence?* that was flawed, in that it assumed that responding to violence was a goal of principals. Instead, principals made deliberate decisions that were based on their expectations of what an excellent schooling experience would offer students, and what the role of school staff would be in providing such an experience. Moreover, they did not make such decisions in a vacuum, lacking knowledge or understanding of what programs were available in the area of school violence. On the contrary, principals were well aware of what resources were available. Instead, they used many sources of influence and personal beliefs as a filter through which they prioritized problem areas and determined the optimum course of action. A more appropriate research question would be: *What influences principals to adopt new strategies to address their expectations for meeting the schooling needs of their students?*

Philosophy underlying practice. The role of values in the decision making process reinforces previous work by Campbell-Evans (1991), who found that principals' values greatly influenced both the means by which they resolve problems and conflicts, as

well as how they specified goals. She contended that conflicts arose when externally imposed directives contradicted principals' personally held values. The zero tolerance policy tension, identified by the principals in my study, was supportive of Campbell-Evans' argument.

Zero tolerance was seen by principals as their board's answer to parental and community pressure to deal with school violence. Although Enns (1981), Holmes (1986), and Walker (1994) believed that too often administrative decisions were made without the benefit of reflection or sound guidance, this was not the case with the 12 participants. Rather, they saw the expulsion or suspension of students as a choice of expediency and were not prepared to surrender to political pressure to "do something" about school violence. Greenfield (1991) and Campbell (1994) admonished the lack of moral reasoning applied in administrative decisions and suggested that issues are too often addressed by using problem solving strategies deficient in ethical or moral reasoning. For Campbell (1994), the challenge was for administrators to approach problems on a level above that of "conflict resolution strategies, consequences of efficiency and effectiveness, community and public relations schemes, procedural guidelines, and formative directives" (p.7). By their unyielding and often "rebellious" position on their board's zero tolerance policy, principals in my study demonstrated that they were not making decisions on the basis of what Hodgkinson (1991) identified as the lowest level of value hierarchy (e.g., preferences). Principals were neither willing to set aside their ethical reasoning and answer to laws, policies, and duties that were externally imposed, nor were they prepared to implement mandated strategies that did not address what mattered to effective practice

(McLaughlin, 1990). Leithwood and Stager's (1989) work concluded that in the absence of problem-relevant information, or when problems were considered unique, principals used values and principles in problem solving. In those problem areas where much was known, they also found that the value basis of problem solving was rarely acknowledged. The findings from my own study do not support such conclusions. Principals were considered to be well informed about the problem of school violence and felt that it was not a unique issue. Rather, their experience and knowledge suggested that too many schools had failed to recognize and attend to the real problem

A central belief of the participants in this study was that the junior high schooling experience must be a balance between (a) meeting the academic requirements of the curriculum and (b) the development of social skills. This could only be realized by recognizing and alleviating a number of perceived obstacles. For example, an overemphasis on rules and unfair consequences for misbehavior did not provide students with the opportunity to learn self-discipline. Consistent with the views of Reed and Strahan (1995), Toby (1993), and Weissglass (1996), principals elected to develop expectations for behaviors that would be modeled by staff and encouraged in students, as opposed to creating and enforcing more rules.

Willower, Eidell, and Hoy (1967) suggested that pupil control was a critical component of school culture, which could follow either a custodial or humanistic orientation. The custodial model was driven by rigid rules and regulations, punitive sanctions, and top-down authority. Empowering students to practice self-discipline by focusing on behavioral expectations and concerted efforts to meet students' needs were

characteristic of Willower, Eidell, and Hoy's (1967) humanistic model of pupil control. Hargreaves, Earl, and Ryan (1996) argued that, although the need for custodial control was less in higher grades, junior high schools in particular often moved in the opposite direction by increasing sanctions and punishments. Spady (1995) challenged the bases for control in schools and underscored the importance of adjusting control as students matured and gained greater independence over their lives. Especially during these turbulent years, teenagers needed guidance. However, as Spady noted, such guidance would fail if it were premised on "*establishing* authority or *demanding* respect" (p. 237).

The rejection of a punitive application of the Board's zero tolerance policy was illustrative of principals' inclination towards a humanistic model of discipline. At the core of this stance was, as Marshall (1992) found, a stronger desire to care for students than to protect teachers. That is, principals were more willing to work with difficult students, than to remove them so as to unburden the teacher from the source of disruption. Principals were well aware of the oppositional stance that they took with respect to zero tolerance policies and admitted that it was only one of many areas illustrative of "chronic tensions in public schooling," where imposed rules did not support their desire to help students (Marshall, 1992, p. 381).

In subsequent work by Hoy and Miskel (1993), pupil control ideology proved to be a powerful predictor of school climate. In my study, the model of discipline chosen was also indicative of the type of climate that principals were seeking to create. Huberman and Miles (1984) identified two motives for adopting innovations: a desire to

solve a particular problem, or to deal with an identified gap between goals, and goal realization.

Leithwood and Steinbach (1991) suggested that: "What principals do depends on what they think" (p. 221). In expressing the personal beliefs and values that guided discipline policies, or the hiring criteria of staff, principals demonstrated that the internal (personal) influences were more instrumental in guiding their decisions, than the pressures from the community, staff, or district (external influences).

In his work on organizational culture, Shein (1985) saw three levels: artifacts and creations, values, and basic assumptions (pp. 14-18). Of these, artifacts and creations were the most visible; constructed primarily by the physical environment. Indeed, work by the California State Department of Education (1989) suggested that student-friendly schools are pleasantly designed, with plants, posters, and numerous displays of student work. Although symbols could conceivably embody the cultural characteristics of an organization, they do not offer insights into the leadership of principals. A relationship that may have been suggested between the principals' offices, in this study, and their views on schooling, discipline, or students, would have been made on the basis of false assumptions - not facts.

Perceived role of schools. By creating a climate of trust, safety, and caring, principals sought to address what they perceived to be a gap between the current delivery of education and their personal beliefs about teaching, learning and students' needs. Principals focused attention on those elements of the system that did not support their vision of schooling. For example, schools were reconfigured into smaller, more personal

units so as to tend to the emotional needs of students which were valued as much, if not more than, their academic needs.

Personal values seemed to play an important role in the decision-making which influenced the climate of the school. Influence, in the context of this study, referred to "the ability of an individual to affect the thoughts, emotions, and/or actions of one or more persons" (Gunn & Holdaway, 1986, p. 48). In order to exercise this influence, principals chose to adopt a "hands-on" approach to their role. For example, they incorporated their personal values into the hiring criteria of staff and often set aside administrative tasks so as to personally deal with students. There was no attempt to be remote, uninvolved, or distanced from ethical dilemmas (e.g., dealing with an abused student, unprofessional staff behavior). On the contrary, principals extended their reach beyond the school premises and school hours (e.g., teen drinking, fighting off school grounds). In all of these actions, principals were guided by a desire to play a lead role in shaping what Leiber and Rogers (1994) considered to be "a paradigm shift in the mission of schooling, the teaching-learning process, and the perception and treatment of children" (p. 63).

Views on leadership. Deal and Peterson (1994) stressed the importance of multidimensional leadership which sees one strategy or initiative as serving many purposes. For example, a lunch time sports program could serve the structural goal of providing students with something to do, and, at the same time, present the opportunity for teachers and students to build meaningful relationships outside of the formal

classroom setting. Evidence my own study suggested that leadership was multidimensional.

Whereas multidimensional leadership can be an indicator of effectiveness, Bolman and Deal (1992) suggested that the contextual nature of leadership requires different patterns of thinking for different situations. In trying to position decision making on issues of school violence vis-à-vis other decisions that principals make, Bolman and Deal's assertion was useful to explore. It is for this reason that their coding frame was considered to be so useful in the analysis of my own data (e.g., structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames). Bolman and Deal's premise was that effective leadership was characterized by an orientation towards political, symbolic, and human resource frames, or what I termed relationship frames. Whereas discussions with principals in my study addressed structural issues such as policies, planning, and evaluation, the dominant leadership orientation was more inclined towards the symbolic, political, values, and relationship frames. Principals spoke of the need to advocate for students (i.e., political frame), their personal philosophy of discipline (i.e., value frame), the need to establish meaningful relationships in schools (i.e., relationship frame), and, to a larger degree, the need to build a vision of schooling based on moral leadership (i.e., symbolic frame). Bolman and Deal found that men and women in similar positions did not differ in the cognitive frames they used. The findings in my study also suggest this to be the case.

Previous experience. Except for one, the principals in this study were experienced administrators in the district. They had been moved several times for specific purposes.

These reasons varied from "having to shape up a school," to "bringing the parents back on side," or to "stop the outflow of good teachers." They had served a number of years in schools identified to be high needs, as well as schools considered to be in "tough" neighborhoods. It was evident from the source who nominated their names to me why this was the case. His comments regarding the 12 principals were: "they are the ones we use the most," "these are as good as they come," "I've given you the best we have," "these are the most caring, dynamic, and hard working principals in the district who will go to any lengths to look after kids, they aren't afraid to stand up to anyone on that." It is not clear where the commonalities resided amongst the group. That is, did these principals learn to deal with issues in similar ways because of their comparable career paths, or did the district provide them with parallel moves because they exhibited similar traits? One of the comments suggests the latter view to be more probable:

> I think they [the senior administration] look inside their teaching force to have the current leader identify teachers that are out there that have, I guess, a degree of caring, responsible attitudes, that have a fondness for the art of teaching, like children, that are friendly, that have a sense of purpose. And somehow the system draws those people in and creates, nourishes, develops leaders from that particular group and it's probably the value of the system that draws in a certain type of person and I would imagine if the culture and the system changes over time, principals will look different. (Cory)

In so far as determining what influence the professional experience of principals had on decisions to address school violence, it seems that their leadership capabilities

were developed long before they became administrators. Although the majority had pursued graduate studies and demonstrated a commitment to ongoing professional development, their personal qualities of caring and commitment to children were developed as teachers. In the eyes of the source who provided their names, they personified the values of Sergiovanni's (1992) notion of professionalism:

> The term professionalism was derived from the religious setting, where it pertained to the public statement of what one believed and was committed to. . . . Professionalism could be understood as competence plus virtue . . . as commitment to the professional ideal of exemplary practice in the service of valued social ends. (p. 68)

Summary. Marshall (1992) suggested that the study of school leadership must begin with an understanding of the values, assumptions, and behaviors of the principal. This view was confirmed by Bolman and Deal's work (1992), concluding that the cognitive orientation of effective principals is associated with symbolic qualities (e.g., strong communicator, inspirational, strong sense of vision). The findings in this study indicate that, in terms of decisions related to school violence, principals are influenced by their: (a) perceived role of schools, (b) personal perspectives on leadership, (c) philosophy underlying practices, and (d) previous experience.

Hargreaves, Earl, and Ryan (1996) argued that the current focus on curriculum has displaced efforts of principals to provide care, develop relationships, and foster a sense of attachment among people in schools (Sergiovanni, 1994). The findings of this study suggest that this is not the case for the 12 principals interviewed. At the core of their

decisions was meeting the needs and best interests of students. These needs were identified on the basis of what principals believed to be the purpose of schooling, the requirements of adolescents, and the role of the principal. The experience of administering in "high needs" schools also played a significant part in influencing these views.

Decision Making

The findings have suggested that how principals conceptualize school violence and the role of schools, influences their decisions. Emerging from the discussion, were issues more related to school climate than to school violence and for this reason, the literature was revisited with a focus on the former. Identifying needs, validating options, and reaching a decision are areas that will be discussed in this section. These findings are linked to the subproblem: *What processes are involved in making decisions to address school violence?*

Simon (1993) suggested that decision making is a three-pronged process which involves: (a) determining what the problem is, (b) conceptualizing possible solutions to problems that have been prioritized, and (c) evaluating and choosing from amongst a variety of problem solution strategies (p. 394-395). Principals in this study, clearly did not define the problem as school violence. Rather, as Fisher, Grady, and Fraser (1995) discovered, what constituted the problem was the climate of the school which influenced the behaviors of staff and students. This climate was affected either positively or negatively by such factors as relationships, discipline policies, and the principals' leadership style. As possible solutions to the problem of a school climate that did not

meet the needs of students, principals chose to establish positive rapport between teachers and students, provide opportunities for staff and students to participate in decision making, and restructure the school into smaller units that fostered a more positive learning and teaching environment.

With regard to the principals in this study, insights into what the merit of various options were came from a number of sources: (a) by reading journals on middle schools, (b) seeking students' perceptions, and (c) hiring and empowering "like-minded" staff. Walking the halls, inviting dialogue with students, coaching team sports, and actively encouraging meaningful relationships between staff and students also provided principals with the opportunity to validate their personal views on what needed to be done. They did this directly and informally. This quality was what Bennis (1984) described as "the ability to read the souls of others in a fashion that raises human consciousness, builds meaning, and inspires human intent" (p. 70). In part, that "intent" was to have a vision (e.g., a school which meets the emotional and academic needs of students), to make known one's values and beliefs (e.g., publicly stated position on zero tolerance), to build support among like-minded people (e.g., hiring staff), and to involve as many people as possible in enabling this vision (e.g., communicating with students, parents, staff).

In his work with administrators, Conway (1984) found several variations existed in administrators' practice of participative decision making: mandated versus voluntary, formal versus informal, and direct versus indirect processes. The concern for school leaders, he noted, was knowing when to apply each of these variations. In this study, principals were willing to accommodate the views of others, and encouraged participation

in deciding from a choice of options that were based on their own beliefs. Leithwood and Steinbach (1991) put forward a definition of empowerment that is particularly useful in this discussion. They suggested that empowerment was associated with "greater discretion for teachers to shape their own work, a central role for teachers in significant school-level decisions . . ." (p. 223). From the perspective of the principals in this study, empowerment was a strategy used in those circumstances where others had already "bought into" their vision. Hiring like-minded staff was viewed as an effective way of ensuring that empowerment would achieve principals' goals. By creating the smaller teaching and learning units, principals also delegated more detailed problem solving to the level nearest to the issues. They remarked on how much easier it was to have teams of teachers strategize about a given problem, than to deal with it in large staff meetings. Principals had faith that in the end, a decision would be reached based on the best interests of students. This was guided by a confidence in the leadership and persuasive abilities of those staff that they had personally hired.

For the principals in this study, leadership style and the decision-making process were inseparable to the extent that the former influenced the latter. Empowering others to seek strategies or resources needed to ameliorate a problem were successful because principals exercised a leadership style that would: (a) ensure that staff, students, and parents were committed to shared goals and purposes, (b) provide opportunities for staff and students to find creative ways of dealing with problems, (c) foster a caring, trusting, and harmonious teaching-learning environment, and (d) support, inspire and appreciate the exemplary efforts of staff and students. This leadership style was what principals

referred to as "planting seeds," "empowerment," " and nudging them along." Starratt (1995) described this as institutionalizing the vision and expressing the school's core values. Sergiovanni (1994) referred to this as "moral leadership," demonstrated by a genuine desire to include all members of the school community in the decision-making process.

Principals recognized problems, identified the outcomes of decisions, responded to the needs of others, took risks, and were prepared to delegate decision making to those who they knew shared the same vision of schooling and education.

Huberman and Miles (1984) offered two reasons for innovative change: to solve a particular problem or to address an identified gap in performance. The findings from this study offer a third motivation which is oriented more towards individual leadership qualities than on broad-based organizational theory. Exemplary leaders are motivated in their decision making by a desire to create an environment which achieves, at the minimum, an equilibrium between their personal beliefs and values and those of the other members of the organization.

Summary. Based upon their view that decisions were not made for the purpose of reducing school violence, principals used four steps in their decision-making process: (a) identify the needs of students, (b) consider alternatives influenced by personal beliefs and experience, (c) validate options through consultation with staff and students, and (d) create a climate which empowers staff to choose amongst the alternatives.

Effectiveness of Principals' Strategies

Upon ascertaining the elements and processes of decision making related to school violence used by principals, the following subproblem was addressed: *To what extent are responses to school violence considered to be effective by principals and the literature?*

In his text *Life in Schools*, McLaren (1989) drew on the works of Freire and Giroux, in comparing the differences between *schooling* and *education*:

> The former (schooling) is primarily a mode of social control, the latter (education) has the potential to transform society, with the learner functioning as an active subject committed to self and social empowerment. (p. 265)

This goal of education is evident in the literature on effective school violence prevention programs. Many of these initiatives (e.g., Lieber & Rogers, 1994; Shostak, 1986; Yonker, 1983) have focused on student involvement as key to their academic, social, and emotional growth. Despite the value of addressing social skills in schools, the Alberta government's *Educational Quality Indicators Initiative* (Alberta Education, 1993b) abandoned assessments in this area, concluding that measuring and reporting social competence were too difficult and complex.

In Florida schools, antisocial behaviors were significantly reduced because principals maintained a high profile and placed a high priority on establishing caring relationships with the staff and students (Kadel & Follam, 1993). Shostak (1986) and Yonker (1983) linked violence as an outcome of disruptive behavior that had been ignored, or attributed to inappropriate causes. Reprimanding or removing disruptive or

violent students instead of dealing with the underlying causes for such behaviors often exacerbated the problem. Establishing a culture of caring, was linked by Felson (1994) to a reduction in the level and nature of violence in schools.

The final subquestion of this study considered the effectiveness of the strategies principals chose to address school violence vis-à-vis what the literature suggested. The choice to deal with the underlying causes of misbehavior, the refusal to adopt zero tolerance practices, as well as the commitment to model appropriate behaviors were indicators that the principals in this study were moving in a direction deemed effective by these researchers.

When asked what would make a positive difference in their schooling experience, junior high school students (e.g., MacDonald, 1995; 1997a) suggested that, in lieu of increasing sanctions and punitive consequences for misbehavior, a greater emphasis should be placed on the learning of pro-social behaviors, such as acceptable strategies for dealing with conflicts. Students reflected on their desire to see a kinder and gentler approach to their misbehavior. Moreover, they believed that school discipline, based on punishments and increased sanctions, contributed to a climate of discontent and an increase in misbehavior. This opinion was shared by the principals in this study and inspired a more humanistic model of discipline for precisely those reasons.

In their work on the criteria needed to establish successful conflict resolution programs in school, Lieber and Rogers (1994) found the following were necessary: (a) leadership from the principals, (b) programs based on identified needs (i.e., not

"canned"), and (c) an ongoing commitment to "walk the talk." In dialogue with the 12 principals in my study, all three criteria were being met in their schools.

In 1989, Johnson and Johnson wrote of the exemplary practices of principals who restructured their leadership style and their schools into cooperative learning environments. Achieving this environment called for the following strategies: challenge the status quo, create a shared vision, empower students through cooperative learning, empower staff though cooperative teams, lead by example, and encourage the heart (pp.10:3-10:8). The findings presented in this study suggest that principals embraced the tenets of cooperative school theory, exemplified by:

1. A rejection of the district's zero tolerance policy.
2. Hiring and empowering staff who related well and were committed to children.
3. Actively soliciting the views of students, and according them with respect.
4. Replacing discipline based on control and sanctions with compassion, forgiveness and caring.

Whether we call it a "safe and caring school" or a "cooperative learning environment," these principals were able to make a positive difference in their schools by embracing strategies that research indicates are effective.

Without concrete observational data and input from students, parents, and teachers of the respective schools, it is difficult to state unequivocally that the 12 principals were, in fact, effective in addressing school violence. However, a comparison of the findings and related literature suggests that the underlying beliefs, values, and goals defined by principals were conducive to effecting a positive outcome in their schools.

Summary. In their recent book, *Schooling for change: Reinventing education for young adolescents*, Hargreaves, Earl, and Ryan (1996) suggested that "one of the most

fundamental reforms needed . . . is to make schools into better communities of caring and support for young people" (p. 77). A review of the literature upholds their view, and supports the strategies that the 12 principals in this study applied: (a) creating mini schools (e.g., Burke, 1987; Cheng & Zielger, 1986); (b) promoting and developing the social growth of students (e.g., Noddings, 1992); (c) establishing meaningful relationships between staff and students (e.g., Sergiovanni, 1994); and (d) approaching misbehavior with the view of reconciliation, not retribution (e.g., Hoy & Miskel, 1993).

A Leadership Theory for Addressing Violence in Schools

On the basis of personal perspectives and literature reviewed a model for describing how principals made decisions related to school violence was postulated (see Figure 1). The findings that emerged from the analysis of interviews with 12 principals suggested that influences on decisions related to school violence were more complex than defining the problem, choosing alternatives, and rationalizing decisions on the basis of internal (e.g., role definition, beliefs and values) and external influences (e.g., structural, political).

A substantive theory (see Figure 3) emerged from the findings resulting in a model which linked data categories. The process, variables, rationale, and linkages to the literature for this model are discussed in the following sections.

The Process

Principals identified viable alternatives to address many needs- the reduction of violence not among them. As opposed to targeting the symptoms (e.g., violence) of larger

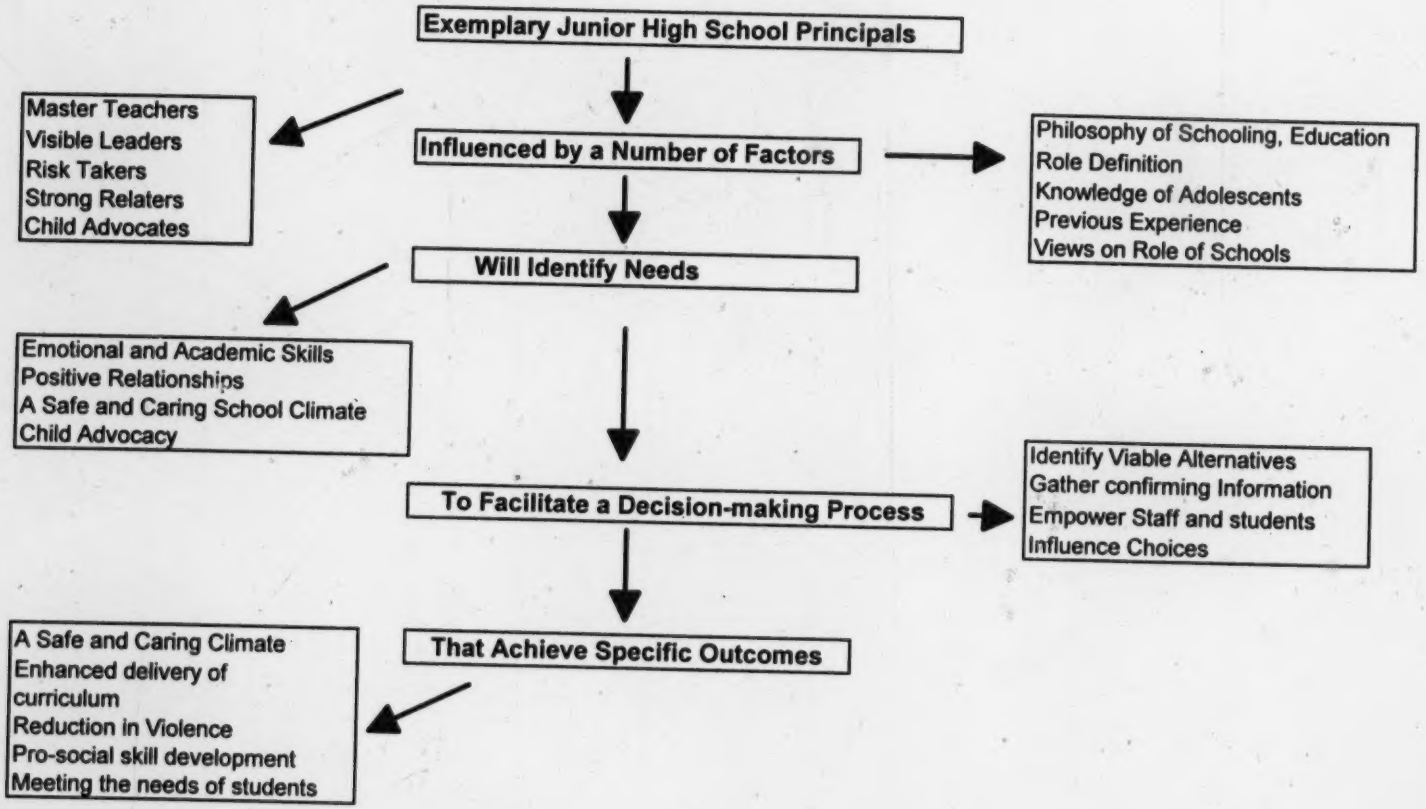

Figure 3. A Leadership Theory for Addressing Violence in Schools

problems (e.g., alienation, boredom) principals identified needs to be: (a) emotional and social skill development, (b) positive relationships, (c) a safe and caring school climate, and (d) child advocacy.

Largely influenced by their philosophy of schooling, knowledge of adolescents, role definition and views on the roles of schools, principals determined viable alternatives to meeting the identified needs. Visible leadership was used as a method to gather information, especially from students, that could substantiate the principal's views on what the needs of students were and what strategies might best address those needs.

Principals were not averse to sharing their strong personal beliefs and values with the school community especially as related to their philosophy of schooling and how discipline policies positioned themselves within that philosophy. Influencing the views of staff had varying degrees of success, largely dependent on the extent to which principals were successful in hiring "like-minded" staff. When successful, principals were confident that empowering staff would result in decisions that were in the best interests of students as well as congruent with their own personal beliefs.

Notwithstanding that a reduction in violence was often an outcome of this decision-making process, meeting the needs of students was deemed to be the more significant outcome. So too, an enhanced delivery of the curriculum resulted from decisions that were based on different identified needs, such as the development of positive relationships.

Variables

I have concurred with the assessment of the source, who provided me with the names of the participants in this study, that the model developed in this study is applicable to *exemplary* junior high school principals. These 12 principals exhibited common characteristics that I believe were key to the cohesion found within the data: (a) master teachers, (b) visible leaders, (c) strong relaters, and (d) child advocates.

Rationale for the Theory

As I struggled through the awkward silences of the first questions in my interviews, I soon discovered that what I had originally attributed to novice interviewing techniques was in fact something else. Principals were genuinely struggling to identify with the issue of school violence, and had difficulty in relating experiences in that framework. Rather than insist on bounding the study to the issue of violence, I let principals digress and carry the conversation to other domains. Thus, what began as a study of school violence, evolved into one which explored issues surrounding the schooling of adolescents: what that meant, and what it demanded of principals.

In the silences and in the paths that our conversations took, it became apparent that those who were recognized as exemplary leaders did not compartmentalize issues or decisions. In other words, school violence did not dominate their agenda any more or less than other concerns such as hiring staff, redesigning school bus routes, or arranging extra-curricular activities. The 12 principals whom I interviewed held strong opinions and used their values and beliefs to guide them in deciding what the needs of students were and how to best address those needs. It was this gap (i.e., what needs were not being met) that

constituted "the problem," not school violence. Personal and external influences guided the conceptualization of both the problem, as well as the process of making decisions to alleviate the problem.

Although principals held strong beliefs about the role of discipline, the goals of schooling, and the needs of students, they knew the value of collaboration and they were not threatened by sharing their leadership. Of course, hiring staff who were like minded and shared common beliefs about the needs of adolescents eased any apprehension about empowerment. Parents and staff were viewed as both assets and limitations to principals' effectiveness in implementing their vision. Rather than create animosity or alienate these groups, principals were prepared to inform, educate, persuade, but rarely compromise their principles. They engaged others in decision making by setting expectations for behavior, for outcomes of schooling, and for the relationships that would facilitate dialogue on how to best achieve these expectations. By ensuring that their vision was clearly articulated, and like-minded staff were hired, principals were confident in delegating much of the "how to's" to the classroom teachers, or teaching-learning-centre teacher units. When deemed necessary, principals would intervene in order to communicate problem areas, or to propose alternative strategies.

First and foremost, principals' priorities lay with their students, and this responsibility was extended beyond the walls of the school. They made no apologies for going the "extra mile" on behalf of students- whether it was to arrange for remedial math classes, supervise Saturday schooling, respond to teen conflict in the community, or confront teenage drinking on weekends. These leaders were advocates for their students

and felt that it was their duty to promote the positive image of youth, despite the challenges of a society which they felt had a negative image of teenagers.

Linkages to the Literature

Hargreaves, Earl, and Ryan (1996) spoke of "exceptional" leaders as those who were visionary, charismatic, and transformational. Actively seeking out group interpretation, and respecting the views and participation of others, are strategies that Leithwood and Steinbach (1991) recognized as being characteristic of "expert" leaders. The 12 principals in this study were identified as exemplary because they were willing to take risks, cared about students, and made a positive difference in their schools.

These principals were influenced to address school climate, not violence, on the basis of their previous school experiences, their beliefs regarding the needs of students, the role of schooling, and their own as a leader. For example, their decisions were governed by the merits of emphasizing pro-social behaviors in students, as opposed to developing strategies to suppress misbehavior (e.g., Ciminillo, 1980). The rejection of zero tolerance policies by these principals, supported Brentro, Brokenleg, and Van Brockern's (1990) belief that schools should not turn away those students who need a sense of belonging that is lacking in their lives. Despite the difficulty of balancing the rights of students to a safe environment with a belief that perpetrators should not become "someone else's problem," principals did not engage in ethically neutral problem solving (Campbell, 1994).

A key factor in decision making was problem interpretation, which as Mawhinney (1994) noted, was an important determinant of how problems were later addressed.

Conceptualizing the issue as one of school climate, not school violence, prepared principals to deal with the underlying causes of student behaviors, many of which were under the direct control of the schools themselves (e.g., Shostak, 1986; Yonker, 1983). Rather than focus on defining those behaviors that were termed "violent," the principals revealed what Hoy and Miskel (1993) termed a "symbolic dimension," by seeking a common interpretation of students' needs and communicating those needs to their staff.

Fisher, Grady, and Fraser (1995) stressed the need for school administrators to know who their "clients" were and to identify their needs. Walking the halls and actively soliciting students' views (e.g., fireside chats) demonstrated a desire to know students, as well as a genuine care for their well being.

Hiring like-minded staff, who shared their personal beliefs regarding the schooling of adolescents, facilitated a common interpretation of need - congruent with principals' strongly held personal values and beliefs (Hoy & Miskel, 1993). Deal and Peterson (1990) suggested that principals were responsible for how others interpreted what mattered in the school. By clearly communicating their beliefs, principals in this study ensured that decision-making processes focused on strategies related to building a sense of community, empowering students, and meeting students' emotional and academic needs. The policies and practices that flowed from these decision-making processes, ultimately influenced the level of school disruption and violence (Toby, 1993).

One of the most important outcomes of principals' decisions was related to school climate. Hoy and Miskel (1993) referred to school climate as that set of elements which influenced the behavior of people in the school community. Lieber and Rogers (1994)

found that principals shaped school climate especially when their own behaviors modeled those expected of staff and students. Principals in this study believed that their efforts at improving school climate positively influenced the behaviors and attitudes of students.

Summary. A model describing a leadership theory for addressing violence in schools suggests that exemplary junior high school principals, influenced by a number of factors, choose to make decisions related to school climate, as opposed to school violence. Using a process that identified the needs of students and sought validation of those needs from an empowered school community, principals were able to build a safe and caring school community that tended to the emotional and academic needs of students, enabled the formation of healthy relationships, and raised the positive image of adolescent students within the community.

Chapter Summary

In her work on the problemitization of violence in school, Mawhinney (1994) suggested that polices were established on the basis of how the problem of violence was conceptualized and later defined. To the extent that principals did not view violence as the problem, and therefore the policies and practices that they implemented did not have the intended outcome of reducing violence, Mawhinney's argument is legitimate. However, the findings in this study suggest that exemplary principals do not just behave on the basis of how they interpret or confer meaning on a problem, but they make choices on the value they place on the subsets of that problem: (a) the people (e.g., students), (b) the activities (e.g., schooling) , and (c) the types of relationships they see as

being important in their lives. Effectively, exemplary junior high school principals respond to school violence through a decision-making process that focuses on meeting a number of identified needs that violence is symptomatic of and achieving specific outcomes designed to be in the best interests of students. This is an important finding, because it challenges the strategy of current directions in Canada (e.g., Alberta Education, 1993a, 1994; British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994; New Brunswick Teachers Federation, 1979) which have been specifically designed to reduce school violence.

For those who might believe that these 12 principals were "soft" disciplinarians, nothing could be farther from the truth. Although they were opposed to the rule-bound, authoritarian models of discipline and punishment, they were, nonetheless, uncompromising in their belief that students and staff must be held accountable for their actions. However, consequences that formed a part of that accountability were based on forgiveness, understanding, empathy, and maintaining the dignity of all those involved. The golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have done unto you," served as a guide for decisions regarding discipline. Each of the participants in this study articulated the importance of this rule and the belief that decisions especially related to student discipline should reflect the values of justice, forgiveness, compassion and fairness.

Visible leadership was demonstrated by walking the halls, welcoming buses, and inviting students to share their views on what improvements could be made in the school. Principals targeted decisions to meeting the needs of students without separating goals into reducing violence, decreasing student smoking, curbing teenage drinking, or increasing staff morale. Initiatives had as desirable outcomes: establishing a climate of

mutual respect, providing students with a sense of belonging, and creating an environment that was safe, welcoming, and caring.

Chapter 6

ACT VI

Scene I: In the kitchen of Supleh High school's principal, Saturday morning

Eneri could not believe the headline that jumped out at her from the *Saturday Times*. She read it over and over again, finding it difficult to compose herself:

"*Supleh High Student in Critical Condition after Brutal Stabbing Friday Night*"

Fighting her trembling hands, she read on:

> *A young teenager is fighting for his life today after receiving multiple stab wounds to the chest and face. It happened in the quiet, affluent neighbourhood of Moonwalk, sometime around 11pm last night. Witnesses told police that two groups of teens had gathered for a fight outside a local strip mall. Bystanders, who did not want to be identified did say that this altercation was not unexpected. Apparently, the attack was a result of an incident that had begun earlier in the day, at one of the local high schools, Supleh High. Police are continuing their investigation, asking anyone with information that could assist them in this case, to contact them immediately. A school official has been assisting the police and charges may be laid. It is not known if the student is expected to survive his injuries.*

The phone rang, affording Eneri little time to digest the news. It was Cam: "What the hell, eh? I figure from the paper that it was those kids that I dealt with yesterday in the parking lot. Good I got those license plates. I just thought I'd tell you that I've been talking to the cops." Eneri sighed and could barely keep her voice from shaking. "Cam, which of our students is in critical condition? We should go to the hospital, send flowers, do something! My God, I can't imagine what the rest of the students are going through - those that were there, let alone the parents." "Well, to be frank Eneri, these are punks and they usually get what they deserve. I'm just damn relieved that they didn't pull this stunt in the parking lot - which they would have had I not taken control. Now, wouldn't that have been a knock against our school, eh?," Cam exclaimed. Eneri wasn't listening. As Cam spoke, she had been flipping through the Yellow Pages, marking the numbers of local florists. Coat in hand, Eneri cut the conversation short, and drove to the hospital. Cam could wait, she thought to herself. Her students needed to know that she would be there for them.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter provides a summary of the research study and offers practical and theoretical implications of the findings, based on a discussion of the conclusions reached and the recommendations made. The model developed during this study of *School Violence: Administrative Leadership in Decision Making* is reintroduced, and discussed in relation to what consequence it may have on future research: The findings in this study are also explored in terms of their relevance to practice. The chapter concludes with personal reflections on the emergent theory and its relation to larger issues.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore those variables which influenced principals' decisions regarding policies, programs, and strategies focused on school violence at the junior high school level. The findings were intended to enable understandings of the rationale and the processes behind principals' decisions, thereby offering insights into current approaches for addressing school violence.

The review of the literature did not render a definitive conceptualization of school violence. There were inconsistencies in the definitions of the term, as well as incongruity as to whether school violence was becoming more prevalent. It also appeared that through the politicization of the issue, old problems (e.g., lack of discipline, disruption, delinquency) had simply been recast with a new name. The need to understand how principals framed school violence was thus determined to be a major first step in this study.

It was for this reason, as well as the exploratory nature of the research, that a qualitative approach, using the principles of grounded theory, was followed. Twelve purposefully selected principals from junior high schools in one large urban school district were interviewed. Transcripts were analyzed and data interpreted both deductively and inductively using the theoretical umbrella of symbolic interactionism.

What began as a study of decision making in school violence proved to be more relating to insights on leadership, the purpose and processes of schooling adolescents. Although research in the area of violence prevention programs and initiatives (e.g., Hill & Hill, 1994; Shakeshaft et al., 1995) was useful in the original conceptualization of the study, work by authors such as Bennis (1984), Hargreaves, Earl, and Ryan (1996), Sergiovanni (1994), Begley and Leithwood (1990) and Bolman and Deal (1992), proved to be as relevant and insightful once the data were analyzed. From the findings emerged an understanding of what motivates exemplary principals to address problems that arise in their schools. They made choices based on the values placed on: (a) the people (e.g., students), (b) the activities (e.g., schooling) , and (c) the types of relationships they viewed as important in their roles. In terms of school violence, the principals in this study responded through a decision-making process that focused on meeting a number of identified needs for which violence was merely a symptom.

Findings

The conclusions presented in this chapter were supported by 17 findings which are summarized as follows:

1. Principals described violence in broad terms, conceptualizing violence as a symptom of other problems that were often under the direct control of schools.
2. Principals make choices based on the value they place on the subsets of that problem: (a) the people (e.g., students), (b) the activities (e.g., schooling) , and (c) the types of relationships they see as being important in their lives.
3. Although principals were uncompromising in their belief that students and staff must be held accountable for their actions, they were opposed to the rule-bound, authoritarian models of discipline and punishment.
4. Consequences that formed a part of that accountability were based on forgiveness, understanding, empathy, and maintaining the dignity of all those involved.
5. Principals believed that decisions, especially those related to student discipline, should reflect the values of justice, forgiveness, compassion and fairness.
6. Principals demonstrated visible leadership by walking the halls, welcoming buses, and inviting students to share their views on what improvements could be made in the school.
7. Principals targeted decisions to meeting the needs of students without separating goals into reducing violence, decreasing student smoking, curbing teenage drinking, or increasing staff morale.
8. Initiatives had as desirable outcomes: establishing a climate of mutual respect, providing students with a sense of belonging, and creating an environment that was safe, welcoming, and caring.

9. Meeting the emotional and academic needs of students was often deemed more critical than academic curriculum delivery.
10. In order to facilitate their objective, principals reinterpreted policies (e.g., zero tolerance) and embraced a humanitarian discipline model which was often contrary to their district's or staff's position.
11. Expectations and assumptions that parents and the larger community had of teenagers were often perceived as incongruent with those of principals. Their desire to give students a "voice" and advocate on their behalf grew out of this tension.
12. In order to provide students with an environment that met their needs and better facilitated a process for identifying those needs, principals reconfigured their schools into smaller units (e.g., TLCs), and encouraged an openness amongst staff and students that resulted in a school community.
13. Staff were held accountable for the behaviors they modeled and were encouraged to relate personally with their students in the manner demonstrated by a "visible" principal.
14. The outcomes of the decisions that principals made were not viewed as a reduction of school violence. Rather, outcomes were identified as an improved school climate, positive public relations, and a teaching and learning environment that was safe and caring.
15. The experience of administering in "high needs" schools, the influence of their city's culture, personal beliefs and values, played a more significant role in influencing

principals' decisions than did the socio-political sphere (e.g., board policies, government initiatives).

16. The strategies that principals adopted have been regarded as effective by researchers. These included: (a) creating mini schools, (b) promoting and developing the social growth of students, (c) establishing meaningful relationships between staff and students, and (d) approaching misbehavior using a humanistic, not control-based, discipline model.
17. As part of their advocacy for teenagers, principals focused more on the successes of students (even incremental successes) rather than their failures, or delinquent behaviors.

Transferability of the Findings

In Chapter 3, the method of collecting data from 12 purposefully selected principals and issues related to transferability of the findings was discussed. It was also suggested that readers formulate their own opinions as to whether the emergent substantive theory had relevance in other areas of principal decision making. Strauss and Corbin (1994) noted that substantive theory is rooted in knowledge that is "closely linked with time and place" (p. 276). Whereas I believe that the findings were a trustworthy representation of the views expressed by the principals in this study, I do not consider the conclusions to be bounded by time and place. The conclusions reached are deemed transferable as they have touched upon issues such as: leadership, school climate, and school effectiveness which bear relevance to a number of theories outside of the area of school violence.

Conclusions Related to Practice

On the basis of the 17 major findings derived from the data and their relationship to existing literature, 10 conclusions are presented and discussed. These are organized into two sections: conclusions related to practice, and conclusions related to theory. For the purposes of clarity, conclusions are displayed in *italics*.

Describing and Reconceptualizing School Violence

Principals interpreted violence in relation to the larger mission of schooling and as a symptom of problems that could often be addressed by the school.

The difficulties expressed by principals, as well as the lack of consistency in defining school violence, reinforces the belief (e.g., Mawhinney, 1995) that there is a lack of conceptual clarity regarding the issue. The different directions that schools are taking in Canada could be partially attributed to this phenomenon. The conclusion that school violence continues to be conceptualized and operationalized in different ways is thus largely dependent on how it is positioned (e.g., as a symptom, or problem; as a student misbehavior, or a manifestation of contributing elements imposed by schools themselves).

This study was unique in that it expanded the issue of school violence from that of a reactive response to youth delinquency. It framed violence as a symptom of a number of factors that are under the direct control of schools, in particular: the goals, values, behaviors, and leadership styles of principals.

The principals in this study chose to discuss issues that extended beyond violent behaviors or youth delinquency. They suggested that the root problem they faced was not

one of reducing or preventing violence, but rather achieving a schooling experience that addressed the multiple needs of their students. Based on these findings, the argument can be made that, for the 12 principals in this study, expending resources on strategies and initiatives that are specifically targeted to address violence in schools would be a misguided effort.

Principals were unwilling to ignore the realities of students' lives (e.g., broken homes, poverty, academic difficulties) and believed that schools were morally bound to deal with those conditions that compromised the emotional and academic growth of students. Although schools could not "do it all," these principals were nonetheless committed to "doing more."

Sources of Influence in Addressing School Violence

In terms of decisions related to school violence, principals were guided by their beliefs and values, what they perceived to be students' needs, their vision of schools, previous experience in "high-needs" schools, as well as the norms and values promoted by the urban culture; not by the opinions or directions of others (socio- political sphere).

Personal values and beliefs. The names of 12 principals were provided on the basis that they were considered to be exemplary leaders in the district. This judgment was made on the basis of one senior district administrator's view that they had a reputation for caring and placing the needs of students first. If we are to concur with the opinions of the senior district administrator, who provided the names of the principals interviewed in the study, that these participants were exemplary leaders especially in the area of safe schools. One could infer that a new criterion of exemplary leadership is denoted by a

desire to serve students on the basis of what is in their best interests. Arguably, "best interests" could have more to do with preconceived notions of what adults, not children deem to be "best interests." The use of corporal punishment, for example, was rationalized with this view in mind. However, findings from previous work (e.g., MacDonald, 1997a, 1997b) suggest that in the case of these 12 principals, both views - students and principals - were in concert: (a) promote a caring environment; (b) identify the real problems students are struggling with; (c) apply fair, meaningful, and remedial discipline; (d) actively seek the opinions of students.

Students' needs. *Principals believed that junior high school students required discipline reflecting justice, compassion, and increased opportunities for creative problem solving and self-discipline.*

Although strategies that are often under the umbrella of violence prevention were adopted (e.g., anger management classes) by principals, decisions to implement such were not based on a perceived need to address school violence. Rather, these principals determined that students could, for example, benefit from learning how to deal with their frustrations so as to enhance the quality of the relationships they built with each other and with their teachers. It was thus in the "best interests of children" that they be provided with the social skills necessary for positive relationships.

The model of discipline principals chose was not based on an increase of power, authority and punitive measures, as is often the case in junior high schools (e.g., Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996). Compliance was not achieved by increased sanctions or using threats. Instead, principals adopted what they believed to be a more successful

approach: a humanistic and democratic means to persuade students to evaluate their choices, and determine which action or behavior was most congruent with the expectations of the school. A knowledge and understanding of adolescents allowed principals to recognize students' need for greater responsibility and control over their lives.

Role of schools. The principals in this study believed that a safe and caring school climate required positive interpersonal relationships built on trust and authenticity. To facilitate the formation of such relationships, they reconfigured their schools into smaller units. Although achievement results, parent opinion, and teacher satisfaction ranked high on the list of goals for these principals, their primary mandate was to ensure that the emotional as well as academic needs of students were attended to. Furthermore, they discovered that building a culture of caring that would attend to such needs was dependent on promoting meaningful relationships between teachers and students and in particular, between the principal and students. In turn, promoting meaningful relationships was facilitated by restructuring schools into smaller units. Such schools within schools (e.g., teaching-learning centers) allowed for a reduced ratio between teachers and students, and a greater likelihood that relationships could be forged. The perceived result was a sense of community, trust, personalized learning, and a program tailored to the needs of students (Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996).

Urban culture. *The metaphors used by principals were reflective of the norms and values promoted by the urban culture.*

Mawhinney (1995) suggested that the study of policy directions should consider societal influences which serve as a filter for defining social problems. On the basis of the findings it appears that the unit of influence is more complex than either society or school districts, as Mawhinney suggested. The metaphors used by these exemplary leaders in discussions regarding decisions to reduce school violence were reflective of the norms and values promoted by the urban culture.

A large, metropolitan center characterized by a highly educated, predominately white collar workforce, this city boasts an entrepreneurial spirit and corporate success attributable to risk-taking achievers. *Kalmon* (pseudonym) had received world acclaim by hosting a number of very successful, high profile international events and had been ranked one of the best cities to live in Canada. Its population was growing rapidly and it ranked second in the country for corporate head office location. The use of corporate metaphors (e.g., foreclosure, client needs, provide a service, lose a customer, if you like the product) as well as the freedom to openly challenge the district's policy on zero tolerance were reflective of its culture as well as the leadership characteristics it valued.

Campbell-Evans (1991) saw principals constrained in their decision making by a lack of resources. Whereas the participants in my study recognized the difficulty that dwindling resources imposed on their schools, they were not prepared to be fettered by it. Enabling different learning arrangements (e.g., schools within schools) and hiring "student-centered" staff were ways of promoting a safe and caring environment, without significant expense. Leadership was evident in their ethical commitment, courage, and

risk-taking (Bolman & Deal, 1992) attributes of leadership that the city encourages and applauds most.

Previous experience. *Principals identified as exemplary administrators with experience serving in what are identified as high needs schools, hold values and beliefs that are conducive to promoting a safe and caring school climate.*

The principals in this study were selected by referral from a senior administrator in the district. They were considered to be dynamic and caring individuals who exhibited a passionate commitment to students. In their previous experiences, they had worked with students who were considered "fragile" - involved in crime, drugs, often with learning disabilities and difficult home lives. In such schools, principals were required to often focus more on the academic and emotional well-being of students, as opposed to their academic needs. An understanding of the requirement to provide these students with a caring environment was an important lesson that these principals carried with them to other, less demanding junior high schools.

Symbols

Symbols, as indicators of leadership, are not directly represented by extraneous variables, such as office decor and organization.

Schein (1985) argued that artifacts, as created by the physical environment, were a critical and revealing element of the cultural characteristics of organizations. The findings of this study indicate that given the marked differences between the physical characteristics of each principals' office, assumptions made on this basis were invalid. That is, although participants were very similar in their leadership styles, values and

beliefs - the symbolic commonalities I assumed to exist (e.g., child-centered offices) - did not materialize. I would conclude that symbols, as indicators of leadership are more legitimately represented by the metaphors of language used by principals and less by assumptions often made on the basis of a cursory observation of the physical environment. Although the physical attributes of an environment can add valuable insights into the ethos of a particular setting, the findings of this study caution that inferences drawn on this basis (e.g., physical attributes of an office) must be validated by other criteria.

Decision Making

Principals indicated that decisions related to school violence were directed at issues of school climate and meeting the many needs of students. *The decision-making process involved was similar and involved five steps:*
(a) an identification of needs, (b) consideration of alternatives which were influenced by personal beliefs and values, (c) validation of options through consultation with staff and students, and (d) creating an environment which empowered staff to choose and implement solutions that were congruent with the principal's beliefs.

Empowerment. *Empowering staff and achieving a personal vision of schooling was facilitated by principals who organized a followership with similar goals and values. This could best be achieved by hiring "like-minded" staff who related well to students and believed in modeling those behaviors expected of students.*

There has been considerable literature written on the topic of empowerment (e.g., Bacharach & Conley, 1986; Maeroff, 1988; Sergiovanni, 1992). As Bacharach and Sheed

(1988) concluded, empowerment is often a vague term describing leadership qualities ranging from being good listeners to sharing power, authority, and decision making. Furthermore, leaders would have to exercise a delicate balance between a laissez-faire approach that could result in poorly defined goals and conflicts from competing interests with the desire to develop a strong school culture based on their own specific values and beliefs. The principals in this study believed that they had so empowered their staff and, to a lesser degree, students to make decisions regarding a broader view of schooling. The theory I put forward is that principals were adept and at ease with operationalizing the concept of empowerment because they hired staff who shared similar thoughts, beliefs, and values. I would suggest that transformational leadership requires less negotiation, motivation, and compromise when principals have a followership with similar goals and motives (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). So too, the most engaging element of empowerment is to lead by example.

Motivation. *Exemplary leaders are motivated in their decision making by a desire to create an environment which achieves, at the minimum, an equilibrium between their personal beliefs and values and those of the other members of the organization. Central to their beliefs was the need to advocate on behalf of students, make decisions in the best interests of students, and be visible leaders.*

Leithwood and Stager's (1989) work concluded that in the absence of problem-relevant information, or when problems were considered unique, principals used values and principles in problem solving. In those problem areas where much was known, they also found that the value basis of problem solving was rarely acknowledged by principals.

The findings from my own study do not support such conclusions. Principals were considered to be well informed about the problem of school violence and felt that it was not a unique issue. Their experience and knowledge suggested that too many schools had failed to recognize and attend to the real problem thus expending resources on *Band-Aid* approaches that answered more to the media's conceptualization of the problem than to the wider ranging issues involved. The strong focus on academic preparation in the absence of attending to the social and emotional needs of students, philosophies of discipline that were ineffective for the junior high school populations, and a society that unfairly maligned teenagers were examples of what principals considered to be the "problems" in need of solving. In a similar vein, principals reproached those schools which had failed to identify the root causes of student delinquency or violence - often related to school climate - and subsequently failed to "reduce" school violence. Moreover, principals were not averse to stating that their values and personal beliefs dominated decision- making strategies.

Huberman and Miles (1984) offered two reasons for innovative change: to solve a particular problem, or to address an identified gap in performance. The findings from this study offer a third motivation which is oriented more towards individual leadership qualities than on broad-based organizational theory. Exemplary leaders are motivated in their decision making by a desire to create an environment which achieves, at the minimum, an equilibrium between their personal beliefs and values and those of the other members of the organization. Although from the perspective of such leaders, the ultimate goal would be to inculcate their principles into their staff, at a minimum, they are

motivated to build a school environment that adopts practices and behaviors that reflect their own values and beliefs.

Effectiveness of Principals' Strategies

In addressing issues related to school climate, principals utilized strategies that the literature has indicated were effective in reducing school violence.

The literature has associated violent and seriously disruptive student behaviors with needs that have been ignored, or conflicts that have been attributed to inappropriate causes. Furthermore, choosing to reprimand or remove disruptive or violent students often exacerbates the problem. Principals in this study did not subscribe to a punitive model of discipline or a belief in the board's zero tolerance policy. Instead, they focused on involving students in decisions that affected them; ensured that their academic, social, and emotional needs were attended to; and restructured their schools into smaller units that fostered a more positive learning and teaching environment. These were strategies that have been viewed as successful in studies across North America (e.g., Fisher, Grady, and Fraser, 1995; Lieber & Rogers, 1994; Shostak, 1986; Yonker, 1983).

Conceptual Framework

The conclusions based on the findings presented in Chapter 4 are best summarized by the leadership theory illustrated and expanded upon in Figure 3 (see page 139). It proposes that: *Exemplary junior high school principals, influenced by a number of factors (e.g., philosophy of schooling, role definition, knowledge of adolescents, previous experience) will address school violence through a decision-making process focusing on*

meeting a number of identified needs (e.g., emotional and academic skills, positive relationships, a safe and caring school environment, child advocacy) and achieving specific outcomes such as a safe and caring climate, a reduction in violence, pro-social skill development, and meeting the needs of students.

Specific elements, critical to this theory suggested that:

1. School violence is symptomatic of other problems that are often under the direct control of schools.
2. Exemplary principals are motivated to expand their role and that of their school to meet the emotional, social, and academic needs of students.
3. Caregiver and service provider orientations dominate the language of exemplary principals.
4. Empowerment is most effective when leaders empower like-minded staff.
5. Promoting and providing opportunities for positive relationships amongst staff and students facilitates a safe and caring school.
6. It is easier to build relationships by restructuring junior high schools into smaller units.

Recommendations and Implications For Practice

Based on the conclusions reached in this study, 13 recommendations are offered that have implications for practice.

On the basis of the conclusions that principals interpret school violence as symptomatic of problems often under the direct control of schools and do not make decisions on the basis of "reducing violence," it is recommended that:

1. School boards replace efforts directed at encouraging schools to *reduce* or *prevent violence*, with strategies to enable a safe and caring school climate.

The findings supported the conclusion that principals saw violent or disruptive behaviors as a failure to understand and attend to the unique needs of adolescent youth. One critical need identified was to provide students with the opportunity to have a voice in the decisions that affected them. It is recommended that:

2. The Ministry of Education expand its measures of schools' success to include progress towards the social and emotional development of students and not just academic criteria.
3. That the Ministry of Education consider legislative changes to the *School Act* to incorporate a code of students' rights and responsibilities.

Principals used four steps in their decision-making process that involved the identification of students' needs, choosing amongst alternatives that were influenced by personal beliefs and values, creating a climate that empowered staff to choose and implement strategies that were congruent with the principal's beliefs, and validating the merits of choices by consulting with staff and students. Empowering staff and achieving their vision of schooling was simplified when principals had a followership with similar goals and motives. This was accomplished by hiring "like-minded" staff who related well to adolescents and believed in the powerful influence of modeling behaviors expected of students. On the basis of these conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

4. That the pre-service of teachers and the professional development of educators consider at what point their pedagogy explores: philosophies of discipline, the conceptualization of violence, the role of policies and school practices influencing student behaviors, and social skill development.

Supported by the conclusion that principals were guided in their decisions by a belief that junior high school students required discipline reflecting justice, compassion, caring, increased opportunities for creative problem solving and self-discipline, the following recommendations are made:

5. That school boards consider the merits of differentiated student discipline policies that would account for students' ages and maturity levels, providing age-appropriate and relevant opportunities for their meaningful participation in the development of such policies.
6. That school boards and schools revisit the effectiveness of zero tolerance policies in light of its perceived ineffectiveness and lack of demonstrated compassion.
7. That student representatives serve as non-voting members of school boards so as to visibly and formally promote the contribution of students to policy development.

In this study, it was found that exemplary principals were motivated by a desire to create a school climate which reflected advocacy for teenagers and a leadership and staff that took the time to develop meaningful relationships with the students. On the basis of this conclusion, it is recommended that:

8. Superintendents take into account the time requirements needed for principals to be "visible leaders" when delegated administrative duties.

Although not specifically targeted at reducing school violence, principals nonetheless, adopted strategies that are supported in the literature to be successful in reducing school violence. This conclusion suggests the following recommendations:

9. That the Ministry of Education, school boards, and schools revisit the current structure of junior high schools with a view to creating smaller schools, or schools within schools.
10. That students be provided with a balanced skill set consisting of conflict resolution and social skills necessary to build and sustain positive interpersonal relationships.

Implications for Practice

Strategies to address school violence in Canadian school districts have primarily focused on "violence reduction" as the objective. I believe that this focus has steered initiatives in the direction of increased sanctions and more reactive stances. The more relevant approach, as adopted by many of the participants in this study, was to determine what behaviors, teaching staff, resources, delivery models, and services were required to provide a safe and caring school. This approach allowed for a more rigorous exploration of those elements within the school itself that influenced student behaviors. This broad-based approach has also been a driving force behind Alberta's *Safe and Caring Schools Initiative*. To date, the results of this initiative are indicating that there is more progress in resource development and greater parental and community support than from previous projects that focused solely on reducing violence. It is proposed that conceptualizing and operationalizing safety and caring is, in the end, more productive that focusing on reducing violence.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY

At the onset of this study, the purpose identified was to explore those factors that influenced principals in their responses to school violence. Assumptions that were central to the research problem and subproblems were that: (a) principals viewed school violence as a problem, (b) principals made decisions with the intended outcome of reducing school violence, and (c) principals identified as exemplary in the area of school violence would have a common definition of the term.

The conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2 was created on the basis of these assumptions, as well as a review of related literature on the topic of school violence. It was hoped that gaps in the literature would offer an opportunity to better understand those factors which most influenced principals in their selection of programs, practices and strategies directed at the *prevention and response to school violence*. Effectively, the study was designed to determine what means best fostered reducing or preventing school violence.

Using the tentative theoretical framework proposed in Chapter 2, data were gathered to explore how and why principals responded to the issue of violence in their schools. It was felt that insights gained from such data would be instrumental in determining which attitudes and conditions most influenced response, intervention and prevention of school violence.

In the end, it was found that these assumptions were flawed and, as a result, the theoretical model introduced in the previous chapter (*Discussion of the Findings*) was

modified, as was a definition of violence put forward in Chapter 2. As the changes were incorporated into the new model, the intended desire to contribute to the literature was achieved. Specifically, this study linked decision-making and school violence literature, introducing a perspective that does not currently exist, and offered a series of steps that were relevant to educational research in general.

There are eight recommendations that emerge from the study that have specific applicability to general theory development related to decision making and problem solving in education (e.g., the schooling of young offenders or special needs students; dealing with marginal teachers). These recommended steps to consider in developing educational theory are reflected in Figure 4.

The modification of the definition of violence proposed in Chapter 2 is an example of how researchers can gain greater insights by remaining vigilant in challenging the assumptions embedded within their research design. On the basis of refuting the assumption that reducing violence is the issue for principals, the principals in this study stated that efforts to reduce school violence did not represent the focus of their decisions. Furthermore, symptomatic terms such as aggression, harassment, and intimidation - common terminology in violence prevention initiatives, had less meaning for these principals than terms which identified root causes, such as: a lack of attachment, an atmosphere of mistrust and uncaring, unconnected school members. Supported by the findings, it was concluded that a more salient definition of school violence would be:

> Those actual or threatened behaviors or actions, that are symptomatic of an unfulfilled need (e.g., to belong, have power, seek approval), expressed in the

form of sexual, emotional, or physical harm, that has a deleterious effect on establishing and maintaining a safe and caring school climate.

Modifying the definition of violence in this study, is indicative and supportive of the suggested steps offered to researchers in Figure 4.

The use of metaphors expressed by principals and the insights they offered were found to be more insightful in this study than the definitions of violence that principals constructed. In a study such as this, guided by an interpretivist orientation, the use of language was an important element to have explored. Despite only a perfunctory analysis of metaphors in the transcripts, the process did provide worthwhile insights into how social realities (e.g., school violence) were constructed, sustained, or changed (Hassard, 1981).

Areas for Further Research

The most significant implication this study has provided for future research comes from the conceptual model developed (see Figure 3). Although each component of the *Leadership Theory for Addressing Violence in Schools* suggests a process for decision making, further study would expand and refine the interdependencies of specific elements in more detail.

Principals in this study were considered, by one senior district administrator, to be exemplary leaders in the area of safe schools. It would be worthwhile to validate this perception with parents, staff and students of the school. Similarly, additional insights could be gained by exploring the perceptions of students regarding how safe and caring they thought these schools were and why they believed so.

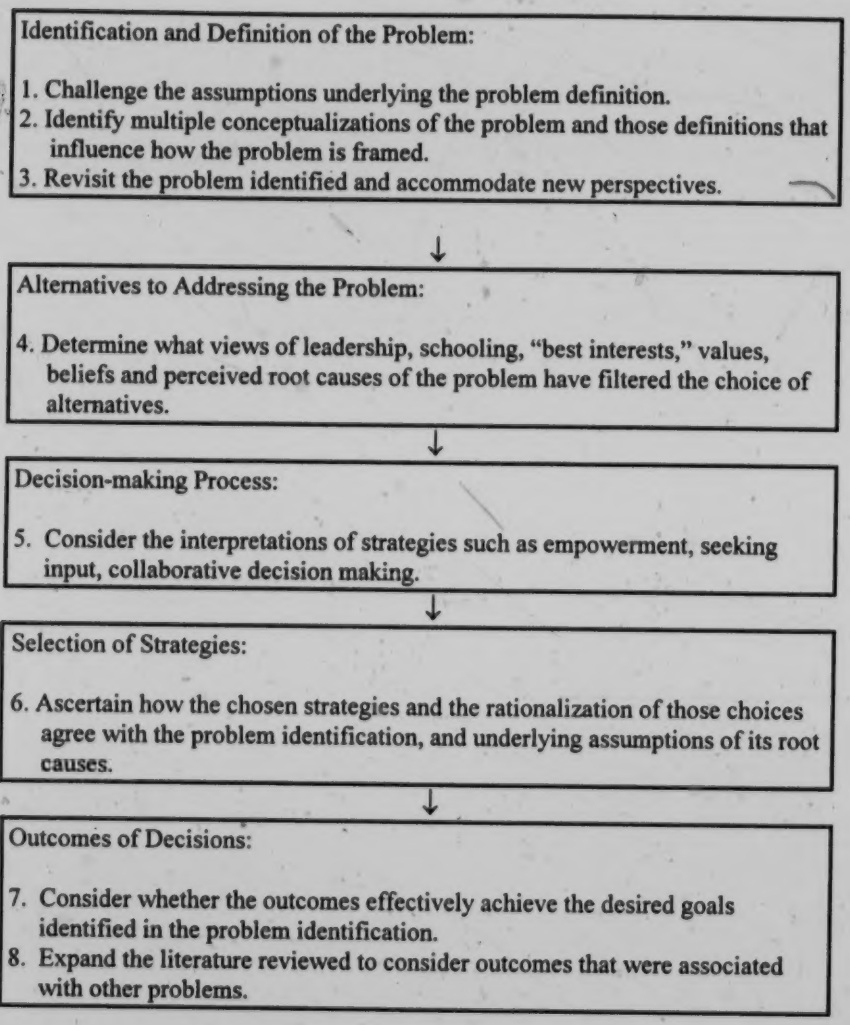
Identification and Definition of the Problem:
1. Challenge the assumptions underlying the problem definition.
2. Identify multiple conceptualizations of the problem and those definitions that influence how the problem is framed.
3. Revisit the problem identified and accommodate new perspectives.
Alternatives to Addressing the Problem:
4. Determine what views of leadership, schooling, "best interests," values, beliefs and perceived root causes of the problem have filtered the choice of alternatives.
Decision-making Process:
5. Consider the interpretations of strategies such as empowerment, seeking input, collaborative decision making.
Selection of Strategies:
6. Ascertain how the chosen strategies and the rationalization of those choices agree with the problem identification, and underlying assumptions of its root causes.
Outcomes of Decisions:
7. Consider whether the outcomes effectively achieve the desired goals identified in the problem identification.
8. Expand the literature reviewed to consider outcomes that were associated with other problems.

Figure 4. A recommended process for validating educational research related to determining decision-making strategies.

Although several initiatives have been taken to better understand the constraints teachers are facing in meeting educational objectives (e.g., Alberta Teachers' Association, 1994), insufficient progress has been made in understanding how educational decisions and reforms have shaped student attitudes, behaviors and perceptions of the effectiveness

of their school learning environments. Research questions could focus on: (a) the structural elements (e.g., school size, configuration) that foster or discourage learning, and the requisites necessary for safe and caring school environments. Schools, school districts, and researchers could also focus on the attributes of exemplary, not just delinquent or disruptive students.

The Alberta Government's *Results Report on the Three-Year Business Plan for Education* (Alberta Education, 1995) concluded that 73% of high school students (n=800) were satisfied with their involvement in decisions that affected life in their school. Eighty-four percent believed that their teachers provided the help and support they needed to learn. This question was not asked of students in the junior or elementary divisions. Given the data which support that some junior high school students are noting a lack of caring and attention to their emotional and social well-being, it would be insightful to conduct a similar survey of students in other divisions.

The data from this research have the potential to narrow the gap between students' and educators' perceptions of the effectiveness of current strategies, practices and programs that are intended to maximize student learning. Asking students about the their schooling experiences would aid in validating current assumptions regarding educational reforms which are intended to be in the best interests of students. As a note of caution, researchers who pursue this area would be wise to note Wilson and Tomlinson's (1986) forewarning that "the assumptions underlying best interests may unconsciously have more to do with adults' biases, prejudices and myths about childhood than with any objective, empirical evidence. . . it is the rare elected body or bureaucracy that acts only in

the interests of an economically powerless, non-voting, and essentially silent constituency" (p. 2).

A number of principals in this study came from a physical education background, and others remarked how a significant proportion of their most valued staff members did so as well. They believed that these were staff with the best understanding of children, coaching and mentoring skills, and fostered positive relationships with students. Further research could explore whether these were skills developed in the physical education program itself and could therefore be incorporated into the general teacher preparation classes, or if these qualities were inherent in the people who enrolled in the physical education program.

Summary

Holdaway (1986) challenged researchers to "make research matter" (p. 249) by asking: to what extent is new knowledge produced, as compared with knowledge which is already in the public domain? In Canada and Alberta in particular, the study of school violence has not been a prevalent topic for educational research - remaining primarily in the domain of criminology (e.g., Smith et al., 1995), psychology (e.g., Mathews, 1994), and teachers' associations (e.g., Alberta Teachers' Association, 1992).

The data that have been accumulated pertain more to the perceived need for extensive information on the extent and nature of school violence (Schmidt, Paquette, & Dickinson, 1990). Running parallel to such studies has been evaluative research determining the benefits of various violence prevention programs. What has been missing, is an understanding of how school violence is conceptualized and

operationalized: issues touched upon by Mawhinney (1995) in her work on school violence policies.

The contribution that this study makes is to position school violence as an educational issue involving the entire school community. As an educational issue, decisions that principals make provide insights into the role of schooling, the values and beliefs underpinning discipline policies, what behaviors are violent, characteristics of exemplary leadership, effective decision-making strategies, and the elements of a safe and caring school climate.

In this study, it became evident that there were inherent flaws in the research question and related subproblems. This stemmed from the mistaken assumption made that principals based their decisions on a desire or need to reduce school violence. In fact, principals did not focus on school violence and chose to focus their energies on issues of school climate and meeting the needs of students. A reduction of school violence was often a welcome result of efforts in these other areas. This revelation now calls into question whether previous research has reached conclusions that were inaccurate due, in large part, to a failure to challenge the assumptions underlying the research problem. A recommended process for validating research, especially that related to decision-making, is offered so as to alert and guide researchers in the future.

Chapter Summary

The difficulty and reluctance of participants to define the term "school violence," supports the lack of conceptual consistency found in the literature. Identifying the issue as broader than that of school violence and refocusing energies on defining those

characteristics of students, and the school ethos that results in safe environment, may be a more worthwhile endeavor. If school districts and individual schools were to focus on those broader problems, rather than the symptom - violence, more relevant strategies might be adopted.

I believe that achieving a safe teaching and learning environment requires strategies which should not be limited to just responding to violence when it occurs, through sanctions (e.g., detentions, suspensions, expulsions). Rather, discipline, when necessary, should be regarded as an opportunity to teach social skills. For these principals, dealing with violence as a symptom of other issues (e.g., boredom, frustration, alienation) provided opportunities for preventative strategies which long preceded the types of serious incidents that often encourage the media hype surrounding school violence. If governments provided schools with the resources required to effectively deal with the multifaceted needs of the teaching-learning cycle, perhaps teachers would not have to resort to dealing with the aftermath (i.e., violence), often responding in a piecemeal way to complex issues which demand diagnosis, planning, evaluation, understanding, and time.

Principals in this study believed that the social and emotional development of students was an important outcome of schooling. Unfortunately, neither the Government of Alberta's education department nor school boards have incorporated these into their indicators of student success. If outcomes were expanded beyond just academic indicators, the value of social skill development could be elevated. The absence of such indicators in later documents by the Government (e.g., Alberta Education, 1995) could be

attributed to either a lack of will, or a lack of knowledge as to how to include the emotional and social development of students as an indicator of the success of schooling.

Admittedly, it is a more difficult task to assess and report on achievements in social literacy. Unless efforts in this area are acknowledged, schools may be reticent to devote resources to this important responsibility.

Attention to the value of the affective domain - the affective domain includes attitudes, feelings, emotions and predispositions (Alberta Education, 1993b) -could also raise the profile of such hiring criteria as identified by the principals in this study: (a) an ability to relate to students, (b) a commitment to contribute to the quality of life for students, and (c) a responsibility to model appropriate behaviors. If such criteria were established in the hiring of school staff, the preservice preparation of teachers would need to ensure that those attributes, regarded as highly influential in establishing school ethos, were identified and addressed in the curriculum.

In the area of career development, school boards would be advised to also consider the criteria by which they judge a teacher to be "principal material." Personal beliefs regarding discipline (e.g., humanistic vs. control based), and an attention to student-centered endeavors would challenge some current thinking regarding school leadership. In this study, principals stated that their district was different from others, in that exemplary teachers, those who had a proven record of relating well to students, were selected for administrative positions; not those who exhibited administrative skills. In order to accommodate this different perspective on school leadership, graduate programs - often a prerequisite for administrative positions in schools, should offer courses that

probe more deeply into morals, values, and philosophies of schooling, discipline, and teaching.

Although processes of decision making, motivational techniques, and planned change are currently addressed in graduate programs, lectures and discussions should probe deeper into issues such as: (a) what constitutes meaningful involvement of students, (b) what role schools play in fostering or rejecting violence, and (c) how violence is conceptualized and operationalized. If we are to believe that violence and disruptive behaviors are impacting on the learning and teaching in schools, and that such concerns have escalated in the past five years, it stands to reason that the topics covered in teacher preparation and graduate programs at the university level should address these so that, at the very least, there is a more useful exchange of information and a greater link between research and practice.

If future research corroborates the conclusions of my own study, that indicators of leadership effectiveness are influenced by the cultural characteristics of the city, districts that have jurisdiction over a large geographical area comprising a number of cities, would be well advised to consider the ramifications of transferring staff. The benefit of transferring expertise, knowledge and experience into a new community could be eclipsed by a tension between the new community's measures of effectiveness and success, and those of the old community.

The principals in this study spoke of the need for schools to raise the self-esteem of students, and recognize successes, more than failures. Kelsey (1992), in his work with marginal principals, put forward an argument that I believe has applicability in this study.

In noting that failure and success were points on a continuum, Kelsey proposed that failure draws meaning from its relationship to success. That is why he felt that research that had only focused on exemplary and not marginal principals lacked potentially useful insights. The issue of measuring school climate and student behavior offers a close parallel. Although academic success indicators abound, there is a glaring lack of indicators which celebrate achievements in either student behavior or school milieu. Schools gather and often publish data regarding the suspension or expulsion of students and incidents of violence or vandalism. Few, if any, reports applaud or recognize the efforts of schools or the achievements of students in developing social skills and positive attitudes. If research and perspectives drawn from research applied Kelsey's argument regarding the continuum, then I would suggest that as much, if not more, could be learned from the study of exemplary students; not just those who are labeled disruptive, delinquent or violent.

The issue of discipline policies and approaches dominated a considerable number of the interviews in this study. Principals were of the opinion that strategies and guiding principles for dealing with these issues, evolved as students matured. If anything, junior high school students, they believed, required at least as much, of a caring and nurturing environment as was experienced in elementary grades. Unfortunately, as Hargreaves, Earl, and Ryan (1996) suggested, in those adolescent years when students are most in need of kindness, schools "crush them with control" (p. 159) and trade care for control in a system designed to punish and discipline (p. 63). A review of school board policies, and the Alberta *School Act* reveals that student behavior codes are not differentiated to

consider the maturation of students. Under *Section 7(c),* all students are expected to "comply with the rules of the school." In the one K-9 school that participated in my study, the behavior code was applied to all students, typically ranging in age from 5 to 14. Although all principals agreed that different degrees of control were needed to account for the unique needs of adolescent students, neither the school board nor the *School Act* provides direction to schools to consider this in their discipline policies. This, I believe, is a shortcoming which could be addressed if student age was recognized as an integral factor in discipline policies. Differentiated policies could temper the tendency of some junior high schools to neglect the need for greater student independence in favour of control or regimentation (Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996).

The need to actively solicit the opinions of students was a dominant theme in this study. This focus emphasized the belief that principals had regarding the rights of students to be afforded the opportunity to be heard as well as protected from harm. Gour's (1988) study of teachers, principals, Alberta Education staff, and trustees, showed support for: (a) the addition of a code of students' rights and responsibilities in the *School Act,* (b) a code of teachers' responsibilities in order to protect students from arbitrary punishment, (c) changes to the *School Act* which reflect the principles enunciated in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and (d) regulations that would lessen inconsistency among educators on reaching decisions that affect the privileges of individual students. The rights and freedoms of "young persons," are recognized in the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* as: ". . . a right to be heard in

the course of, and to participate in, the processes that lead to decisions that affect them" (Sec. 3 (1) (e)).

Despite the efforts of principals such as those who participated in this study, and the positive support Gour found, these recommendations have not been acted upon. In and of itself however, a code of students' rights would not achieve the desired outcome of ensuring the meaningful involvement of children, unless parallel measures were taken: (a) a recognition of exemplary student behavior, (b) the inclusion of social literacy in assessments of student achievement, (c) increased attention to what constitutes an exemplary principal (e.g., in service of children), and (d) a genuine desire to elevate the status of students in the enterprise of schooling.

In 1983, Alberta's Judge Stevenson cautioned that systems of education would have to practice aggressivity in areas beyond administration, working conditions, and finance. Child advocacy and a genuine concern over the effects of educational decisions on students would have to be given more than idle "lip service." He noted, for example, that Alberta's *School Act* places no onus on educators to ensure that students understand, or participate in the rules they are obligated to follow. A Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities has the potential of answering the valid concern Stevenson raised.

Finally, this study has offered insights that have implications for theory. As a consequence of assumptions that were proven to be flawed (e.g., principals seek strategies to reduce violence), the theoretical model and the definition of violence constructed at the onset of the study were modified. A recommended process for validating educational research was proposed, with the hope of alerting researchers to the

need for in-depth problem identification. Ultimately, this study linked decision-making and school violence literature, introducing a perspective that does not currently exist and offered a series of steps that were relevant to educational research in general.

Chapter 7

ACT VII

Scene I: 12th Precinct, Saturday morning

"You're welcome, its the least I could do as a citizen," Cam stated proudly. "How is the kid anyways?" The officer looked up from his report and answered: "no one thinks he's going to make it. But he's young, so you can never tell." Cam looked over the officer's shoulder at the computer screen. "Ya, that's the kid: Don. Drives a white car, tall, lean, blonde. Ya, that's the punk," Cam added. "I'll have to let Eneri know that I'll have an assembly: tell the kids what happens to punks like Don. Maybe they will learn that it's in their best interests to stay away from violence. . ."

Scene II: Kalmon General Hospital, Saturday evening

Eneri could not believe the numbers of teenagers that had gathered at the hospital. Most of her volleyball team was there, the student council, and at least three quarters of the grade 11's. They were very silent, obviously shaken up by the events of the past twenty-four hours. Eneri herself had been there since the early afternoon and she drew comfort from sharing this time with her students. They were a good bunch, and they obviously cared very much about Don. "He was always trying to get away from those guys. He wasn't a fighter, and all he did last night was try to protect the other guy from getting it. He was so kind, always trying to help everyone else even though he was so upset about his parent's divorce. Those guys said that they'd get him one day, but nobody believed it. They even chased him yesterday in his car," Sally told Eneri. "Mr. Smith should have dealt with it yesterday when they came looking for Don at the school. He just made things worse, making Don look like some rat who had called the cops; it made those guys so mad. It made everything so bad." "Ya, well we all know why he did that. Mr. Smith just didn't want to have to deal with it. He just made sure he covered his ass so that the school wouldn't look bad," another Grade 11 student added. "A lot of good he did. He suspended kids that didn't even go to our school, and made everything worse. What a jerk! Someone said he even fingered Don to the cops!"

Scene III: Early Sunday morning, Eneri's apartment

It was after midnight when Eneri finally arrived at home. It had been a long day, filled with emotion. Her thoughts returned to all that her students had shared: their anger, grief, and fear. They were good kids, she thought. And Don had been a true friend, a peace maker. "I'll make sure that we have a prayer for him on Monday, followed by an assembly. I'll tell Cam about it on Monday. Cam, that's another story, she thought to herself. . . slowly drifting off to sleep.

Scene IV: One week later, Supleh High School Gym

Eneri stood in front of the assembled students, collecting her thoughts, trying to remember everything she had noted for her speech to the students:

"Thank you for being so patient. The reason I am late is that I had to take a call from the hospital. They gave me great news- Don will be released later today and will likely return to school in a few weeks (applause from the students and staff). We have all had a very trying experience knowing that one of our own was at death's door. Hopefully, we have all grown and learned from this. It has not been an easy time for any of us. Some of you have laid blame on the administration and, in part, we are not without fault. Through this tragedy, the staff and especially the administration have been reminded of the fact that too often we, as adults, make assumptions about teenagers that are not always correct. We assume guilt and expect you to prove your innocence; we make decisions that affect you without inviting you to participate in the decision-making process; we are intolerant of certain behaviors that we ourselves model; we talk about academic achievements and neglect to applaud your emotional and social skill development; we frequently get so engrossed in our curricular tasks that we overlook the need to better understand the struggles in your lives. So you see, we too have a lot to learn. I guess it just goes to show you that education is a life long journey (a ripple of laughter)." "Better late than never," one student shouted from the back of the gym. Eneri paused, looked at the staff and students who sat in silence, smiled and continued. . .

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

In light of the conclusions reached in this study, I am not surprised that inconsistencies continue in the way school violence is defined and conceptualized. I believe that this is largely a reflection of the difficulties associated with assessing, evaluating and addressing symptoms, rather than the problems themselves. We continue to grapple with the notion of schooling and who is responsible for the emotional development of young people at a time when the family and other social institutions (e.g., the church) are no longer meeting that need. Whether we feel it is within the mandate of schools and teachers to look after the emotional and social needs of students, it is only when we redefine what is it to school and to educate that we will provide the skills, knowledge and environment that nurtures the whole person.

Schools can neither solve nor ignore the realities of children's lives. Unfortunately, efforts directed at defining and recasting behaviors as delinquent, disruptive, or violent, have perpetuated the notion that students have problems in need of "fixing." The result is a failure to concede that there may be an underlying pedagogy, within schools, based on power, dominance, control, and subservience that fosters the very behaviors that educators feel unduly pressured to deal with.

Research (e.g., Wayson et al., 1982) supports the benefit of addressing school issues by focusing on causes, not symptoms; positive and preventative practices, not punitive practices; and making decisions for the benefit of the students. Despite such

indications, little progress has been made towards organizing schools for the best interests of students (Postman, 1995).

In 1967, Willower, Eidell, and Hoy published seminal work on the central role that pupil control plays in influencing the climate of schools. According to their findings, schools that were more humanistic in their approach to pupil behavior were more likely to create environments where students want to be, and not just have to be (p. 42). Humanistic schools focused on establishing positive relationships between students and teachers leading to self-disciplined, not controlled students. They concluded with the foresight that movement of schools, in particular junior high or middle schools, towards a more humanistic ideology, would likely be painful and slow in coming. The recent wave of zero tolerance policies and increased sanctions for student disruption suggest that Willower, Eidell, and Hoy were not overly pessimistic in their predictions.

Public education has received mixed reviews of late, and the proliferation of books on the failure of schools suggests that we are still grappling with the objectives and outcomes of the entire enterprise. On the one hand, government is trying to compete internationally in such areas as math proficiency, while, on the other hand, corporations exact pressure for schools to graduate students with more relevant work skills. The socio-economic disparity amongst families has also pressured schools to address the physical and emotional needs of children, ranging from providing hot lunches to establishing mentorship programs.

At a time when schools are criticized for their failure to impart relevant knowledge and skills, the public laments the lack of morality in today's youth. In the

midst of such competing notions of what is in the "best interests" of children, the voice of pupils is often silenced. From 1989 to 1992, the Alberta Government supported a three-year collaborative initiative with 12 school districts to develop an indicator system for measuring the success of education in the province. Five of those projects explored alternative means by which to assess student success. Of those, three projects addressed student behavior. A number of instruments were developed, that would measure the character as well as academic growth of students. Suggestions as to how to applaud the positive behaviors of students were provided. Despite the fact that emotions, attitudes, and socialization were considered an integral part of the teacher-student relationship, teachers in the junior and senior high school divisions were not enthusiastic about the area of "affective learning." They believed that there was insufficient time for "add-ons" to the current curriculum, especially since the outcomes were difficult to measure. Sadly, the final educational indicators that the government adopted were devoid of any aspects related to the milieu of the school and the development of pro-social behaviors in students. The affective domain is interwoven with every other aspect of teaching and learning and thus impossible to ignore. It is not an add-on if one wishes to established a meaningful relationship with students (Alberta Education, 1993b, p. 140).

Over a decade ago, Nelsen (1985) argued that "schooling is socialization that standardizes, and often eliminates emotions to fit the bureaucratic routine of corporate workplaces" (p. 136). In their study of "delinquents," Stewart et al. (1985, cited in Nelsen, 1985) concluded that their group of students exhibited "a liking for adventure, and tended to be socially bold, thick-skinned and compulsive" (p. 143); characteristics of

many successful entrepreneurs and the principals in my own study. If Nelsen is right in suggesting that schools provide a training ground to enable future employees to function in a bureaucratic workplace, what happens when the workplace demands something else?

Zaleznik (1977) offered an insightful distinction between managers and leaders: managers seek stability, leaders advocate for change; managers avoid conflict and interpersonal working relationships, leaders do not; leaders seek creative solutions, managers avoid risk and innovation. Further to the differentiation between leadership and management, Zaleznik (1990) later suggested that bureaucracies were structured in such a way as to produce managers, not leaders. Applied to the setting of schools, leaders could be labeled as "disrupters" or "troublemakers" and thus constitute an unwanted challenge to the established routines of a bureaucratic organization.

Although I agree that socio-economic factors, negative peer influences, lack of parental supervision, are variables that can influence youth violence, I would suggest that the increase in disruptive behaviors seen in Canadian schools could also be attributed to the conflict arising from schools which continue to prepare students for a bureaucratic workplace that is slowly disappearing. Students are exposed to daily examples of people (often their own parents) who have found success by challenging the status quo, taking risks and controlling their own destiny. They are encouraged, through corporate messages, to enhance their emotional intelligence, become creative problem solvers, and self-actualized learners. A custodial model of schools, wherein students are (a) controlled through punitive sanctions, (b) expected to follow rules without question, (c) passive

learners, and (d) not empowered to influence decisions that affect them, no longer prepares students for the demands of the corporate world.

In this study, I met 12 junior high school principals whose vision of schooling was congruent with the entrepreneurial spirit and corporate vision of the community. They were prepared to stand up for the well being of their students, often against colleagues, parents, and the central district office. These principals actively chose to extend their responsibility to students beyond the walls of the school, and cast aside the traditional view of the professional as autonomous and self-monitoring. They held staff accountable for their behaviors and, excluded those teachers from the hiring process who did not share their beliefs on humanistic discipline and the role of schools in providing for the social and emotional development of students. These principals embraced a responsibility and concern for the well-being of their students that was not limited by the boundaries of the school property or its hours of operation. In their own words, these principals considered themselves to be "relationship," rather than "rule" people. Indeed, I would surmise that they applied the same sense of loyalty, care, and commitment in the manner in which they related to people in general, not just to students.

If, as the principals in this study suggested, positive relationships are integral to creating a climate which rejects violence, is there a linkage between the perceived increase in school violence and the lack of "relationship skills" in today's adolescents? The students who are currently attending junior high schools in Alberta were born between 1982 and 1986. These children, more than any previous generation, have been exposed to a pervasive viewing of television. A Statistics Canada report (cited in Bibby &

Posterski, 1992) found that teenagers spend over 18 hours a week watching television. Images of violence constitute a significant portion of this viewing time. By the time children complete elementary school, television viewing has shown them 8,000 murders and over 100,000 acts of violence (Campbell, 1993). Compounding the influence of media content is the relationship established between the viewer and the television. Channel changers provide children with the ability to be in control, to effect a "quick fix" to a program that does not interest them (i.e., change the channel). Skills necessary for positive interpersonal relationships (e.g., negotiation, compromise, commitment) are unessential for children who watch television or play video games. The increased need, that principals in this study expressed, for pro-social skill development may be related to the lack of opportunities for children to practice the "art" of human relationships - an "art" that is not required by television sets or video machines.

Metaphors are one of the most powerful elements of language; metaphors lead us to see and understand how we shape our realities. Although the participants in this study spoke in terms of "corporate metaphors" (e.g., providing a service, and "taking care of clients"), I believe that they did not consider themselves to be in the business of schooling. The more salient connection comes from the background of a number of these principals: physical education. The underlying metaphors exemplified a derivative of transformational and moral leadership, or what I would term "the charismatic coach."

The charismatic coach uses his or her skills, experience, and love for the "sport" to motivate, engage and challenge the "team" to achieve excellence. At times, players must be sidelined for their own well-being or for the benefit of the team. In lieu of

termination, however, all efforts are typically made to draw on ancillary resources to assist those players (e.g., physiotherapists, trainers). Coaches work in collaboration with a team of experts who are often delegated the task of skill-specific training. Players and their coach have a unique symbiotic relationship that is nurtured by a common goal, mutual respect, high expectations, and a genuine love for what they do. A charismatic coach exercises a powerful influence on the team (both players and supporting staff) by forging relationships and empowering individuals to rise above self-interest and achieve a common vision.

In one of the schools that I visited, the *Athletes Creed* on the gymnasium wall best described what I would consider to be the charismatic coach's vision of schooling:

> We invite you to enjoy an exhibition of skills developed by students in an educational setting. Please be respectful of the dignity and integrity of our opponents, officials, coaches and team members. . .then everyone wins!

Despite initiatives designed to share leadership, empower staffs, and increase parental voice in schools, it is the principal who "makes or breaks the schools" (Royal Commission on Learning, 1994, p. 48). That this role is a tremendously influential role is not surprising and is seen in various other organizations (e.g., the team coach, the chief executive officer). Regardless of how instrumental the school community is in creating the school ethos, the values, beliefs, and attitudes that a principal brings will shape its culture and climate.

Bibby and Posterski (1992) suggested that "the source and stimulus of the violence that occurs in schools flows out of the culture that cradles the school" (p.229). If

school culture influences student behavior and the principal is the dominant influence of school culture: why are so many school violence prevention initiatives targeting students?

I believe that this stems, in part, from: (a) the tremendous pressure schools have been under to deal with school violence, (b) a perpetuated myth that punishment acts as an effective deterrent (e.g., *spare the rod and spoil the child*), (c) the disinclination of professionals (e.g., teachers) to engage in critical reflection of practice, and (d) the general view that wisdom comes with age and experience, so that adults are more infallible than children.

This hierarchical positioning of adults' knowledge and wisdom above children' is also reflected by the insufficient progress made in understanding how educational decisions and reforms have shaped student attitudes, behaviors and perceptions of the effectiveness of their school learning environments. Although some cynics might suggest that policymakers are not interested in the opinions of non-voting members of society, I believe that this has more to do with the difficulties in accessing students' opinions (e.g., ethical guidelines governing consent) and a belief by some educators (e.g., MacDonald, 1995) that children are not credible sources of information related to effective strategies.

One of the principals in this study had the following comment to make to the Grade 9 Graduating Class of 1997:

> If you haven't learned something about leaving the world a better place and turning it into a better place, all the excellence in academics is valueless. What

matters when you come out of here is how we treat people and what you've learned here as to treating people. . . .

As I conclude this manuscript my wish is that we collectively - policy makers, administrators, teachers, and parents - embrace this value-based vision of schooling. In the new millennium we will see an evolution of work, and the workplace that demands new competencies and aptitudes. The rapid pace of change will likely impede the ability of schools to adequately prepare students for the careers choices they will have to make. The central role of principals will be to actively plan, inspire, direct, and motivate school communities to address new visions and goals of education. If these goals do not take into account the influence schools have in (a) shaping the moral fabric of society, (b) elevating the status of children, and (c) inspiring young minds, then the current disenchantment with schools will only intensify.

The way in which school violence has been conceptualized and addressed in many junior high schools is a telling sign that, as adults, we are not always prepared to relinquish power, authority, and control to adolescents. Students are rarely asked to contribute in a meaningful way to the decisions that affect them. Their boredom, disruptive, and often violent, behaviors are rarely identified as symptoms of adult-imposed policy solutions that alienate, frustrate, and "turn off" the very minds that schools are supposed to engage and inspire. The thrust in violence prevention initiatives in schools has been the assumption that violence is the problem, and that the only decisions remaining are: by what means should schools achieve "the end" - a reduction in violence? I prefer to view this issue as did the principals in this study: the "end" is

creating a climate of caring that nourishes positive relationships notwithstanding the challenges of schooling today's teenagers.

The study of school violence is important and it will remain so if positioned as a study of schooling itself. Although there is value in research which evaluates violence prevention programs, or quantifies the nature and extent of delinquent behaviors amongst students, more salient questions would ask:

1. What qualities would a principal require to build a sense of community, and an ethic of caring in schools, regardless of fiscal restraints?
2. What skills, attitudes and values would a teacher need to engage and inspire students so that few would want to disrupt the teaching and learning process?
3. What assumptions, biases and prejudices influence current educational reforms that purport to be in "the best interests of children"?
4. If we believe as the African proverb suggests: "It takes an entire village to raise a child," how do we ensure that the "village" has the values, attitudes, and skills to accomplish this? Moreover, why should our young people trust the village?

In Chapter 1 of this manuscript, the research question guiding this study was stated as: *What factors influence principals in their responses to school violence?* Over the course of the past months, I believe that I gained insights into a larger issue: *What influences principals in their desire to make schools a better place for kids?* The response is neither earth shattering nor novel. The belief in the golden rule, *do unto others as others would do unto you,* best encapsulates the belief that lies at the core of exemplary principals in this study. Implicit in this belief are the values of respect, trust, dignity, care,

forgiveness, and service to others. These principals knew that there were no solutions to *violence*, but that there were solutions to those factors that led to violent behaviors.

Schools, as integral subsets of society, will only be successful if corporate and political communities, as well as educational institutions lead by example - choosing to model behaviors expected of our youth, resolving differences without aggression, and replacing intolerance of adolescent strife with compassion, understanding, and a genuine concern for the best interests of children.

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Appendix 1

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA INFORMED CONSENT FORM

April 1997

Dear [Principal Name]:

Thank you for agreeing to share your valuable time as a participant in the data collection phase of my doctoral dissertation. The purpose of the research is to: (a) determine which new initiatives, programs and practices principals are considering (or have considered) in order to address school violence, (b) explore the factors which influence(d) such choices, and (c) identify the linkages between the violence prevention strategies chosen, and those identified through the literature to be effective.

Our interview will be audio-taped and transcribed for analysis by a secretary at the university who will also be expected to maintain the strictest of confidence. The final report will not identify any person, school or school jurisdiction by name. Therefore, your anonymity will be preserved.

You are invited to review the interview transcripts and comment on the preliminary analyses of the data gathered. In this way, you will be given the opportunity to clarify any misinterpreted information divulged during the interviews and afforded the opportunity to edit the transcripts. Please be assured that if you so choose, you may opt out of this study at any time.

Please sign both copies of this letter, as your consent to participate, and retain one for your personal records. Once again, your time and participation are most appreciated.

For any questions about the research, please contact me at:

(403) 256-6452- Home
(403) 606-7527- Cellular

Sincerely yours,

Irene MacDonald B.Sc. M.Ed.

Appendix 2

INTERVIEW GUIDE

When you see the amount of attention played by various initiatives, and the media coverage re: school violence. . . What does it all really mean? In your schools, what does school violence mean? What are the real issues?

Would that be your personal view, or one shared by this school community?

Who is part of that community?

What has this school (under your leadership) done about school violence in the past year or so re: school violence, either response based, or preventative? Why?

Is there an overarching philosophy of discipline, or of children, schooling, that has guided this direction? Is it your philosophy? Whose?

What role did you play in determining the initiatives, resources, policies?

What influence did you have? How did you influence?

Has this changed from your previous experiences? In what way(s)?

Why were these changes made? (e.g.: critical incident? need? political pressure?)

How did you decide what to choose from such a vast number of possibilities? (based on research? workshops?)

What was the process?

What did you require to make these decisions? (knowledge? buy-in?)

How would you categorize these decisions? (e.g., value-based, political, educational, legal)

You were identified as a "leader" or "exemplary" in this whole area . . . Why do you think that was?

If you changed schools next year, would you follow the same course of action in the next? Why? Why not?

Have you, as educational leader, made a difference? How?

How do you know? How do you monitor results? Evaluate programs?

Tell me about yourself: your previous experience, education?

Have I covered everything? Is there anything more you would like to share with me?

Appendix 3

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT (EXCERPT)

I: This T. L. C. I've been hearing alot about in schools, is teaching, learning communities, where in big schools, that's split off into small mentorship groups?

S: Yes, that's what we, that's what we do. Yes. So the small clusters.

I: Right.

S: Yes, and I think that's really making a big difference too because the staff really do know that group of kids and they, the staff, much better than we ever did before and there's much more ownership there, and a much clearer link with parents to particular people in the school that way.

I: Is that built by grade?

S: This is by grade here, yes. It was, there, I've worked before where it's been inter, integrated but they weren't ready for that here, and it may or may not, I mean there are some pros and cons for both. Last year we ended up with mixed, graded home rooms and we went away from that. You know, you did it all or you don't do it at all so we've stayed strictly by cluster this year and it's making a big difference. The staff, the professionalism, the professional talk, the common planning that they do, is just awesome. I mean it's a wonderful staff.

I: Is it the full mentorship program, or a sort of a derivative of it?

S: It's not a full mentorship program but it's a program that you know, really focuses on relationships and on connecting curriculum. So we don't have bells that ring and stuff like that. We have block timetable and when, I don't know, they just come up with some really exciting things that they, that are, I don't know what they were doing, they were doing something about whales in one class and something about ratios in another class and then there was, they were doing this Japan unit or something and one day I came back from a meeting, and they were all outside, like about 180-200 kids and what they had done, they had found this tiny little picture I think in a dictionary of a whale and they had drawn that whale to scale or they figured out what the size a real whale would look like and so they went out and like spent most of the day drawing this thing, out on the parking lot and then all the kids are all standing in it, you know and somebody's on the roof taking a picture of all these kids, are in this whale and I mean they're not even

covering the whale you know, and I went out there, I mean you just want to stand in this to get a sense of, is this ever big, like imagine! And so I just love the staff doing things like that because they make it fun, and so and yet, look what they've learnt and what they've done and they have just glowed, they're dragging their parents over to see it and, that's another thing you know, we talk alot about public relations and this school had a very negative image in the community and I'm reader and I'm really looking for ideas all the time and there were all these gimmicky things but there's only one thing that really gives you good P. R. and that's when the kids go home and talk to their parents positively about their school. I really believe that's the key and I think more and more that's happening.

I: How do the kids buy into this?

S: Of course, the kids are on the planning committees. All I really do, is organize it, oversee the organization to enable them, to say here's your kids, do what you need to do, you're the professionals, well you mean like could we just do, could we bring a bunch of buses and go on this fieldtrip today and here's the English component of the assignment and here's the science component and here's the math component and so all of those teachers have gone and they each have exercises from each area to do. So they, and they're the kind of people I guess I've hired over the last two years, 27 new people and they're people who are interested in doing that kind of work and they like each other, they have fun and they plan all these neat and crazy things sometimes and it's great.

I: Is there a philosophy that you would say has guided some of these initiatives? Is there something that sort of guides the way you've done things?

S: Yes, I've been a member for many years of the Middle School Association of the America, and it's now moved into Alberta and I'm on the executive of that, and I get alot of stuff through there and it's certainly guided me in terms of being the closest philosophy to what I believe in, and it's a holistic philosophy. It says you can't have one without the other, you can't have academic success, if the kids aren't feeling positively about themselves. You can't, you can't not deal with reality and you know, we live in a lower socio- economic area, we work with kids who are disadvantaged in many ways, we can't avoid that. The other thing that the middle school philosophy, I don't know how much of it you've ever read, but you might want to do a little bit of reading, it's a very strong association throughout the States and actually in other parts of Canada, just not in Alberta.